

Isaiah Chapter 42- John Karmelich

1. My last lesson was on understanding why God has to judge us. That leads us to two important questions: who's doing the judging and what's the standard for that judgment? If He forgives us of all our sins, what's the criterion for that judgment? If God's an all-encompassing entity that we can't see or fully comprehend, how do we face Him? Does He have a form we will be able to see? Of course we Christians accept that Jesus is God and He's doing the judging. Still we should ask, what'll Jesus be like when He judges us? Will He be yelling at people and saying things like "Off to hell you go, so get in that long naughty line over there." No, it doesn't exactly work that way. Therefore, I ask that you join me as this chapter ponders who Jesus is and how He judges us.
2. The important question for us Christians is how are we judged? If we are eternally rewarded in heaven based on how we act, what does that mean? Are the standards the same for all believers? Yes and no. The "Yes" answer, is that God desires we have a servant's heart as we live to do what He desires of us, just as Jesus came as a servant to God the Father's will. I believe the key issue is the word "service". As to the "No" answer, I'd argue that God may call one person to be of service to one person or a small group of people. He may call another to be of service to multitudes. All I'm saying is heavenly rewards are not based on the size of what God calls us to do, but it's on the issue of whether or not we were loyal to what He desires we do. It's not the size of our ministry, but whether or not we've got a servant's attitude toward others and toward God.
3. If you study the Gospel accounts, Jesus never went around saying, "I'm God, deal with it, so bow down and start worshipping Me!" Instead when He started His ministry, He had the attitude of a lowly servant who was willing to help everyone willing to trust in Him. Jesus taught us that just as He was a servant of God the Father, so we should have the same attitude about life and live as if we too are the lowest of servants willing to use our lives to make a difference for others. If it is our desire to be rewarded for eternity, that reward is based on our willingness to be a servant so we can help others in all aspects of our lives.
4. So is that it? We walk around willing to help everyone who asks, ignore our own needs and then God will say, "you helped "x" number of people, therefore you get "x" rewards?" No. First of all, if all we did was help others, how do we earn a living or get the laundry done to use two simple examples. The issue isn't how many people we've helped. It's our attitude as we go through life. Jesus wants us to live as if it's our role to serve others just as He came to earth to serve people. In that aspect, we as believers will be judged based on our attitude of service. Does it mean the size of the house we get in heaven based on how many people we helped? No. In Revelation 4:10, we read of the church elders (think "us") casting their crowns (think rewards) before Jesus effectively saying they give Him all the credit and it was their honor to serve Him.
 - a) My point is the reward for service is that service. We'll get far more joy in this life being of service to others than we ever get doing things for ourselves. So are you saying when we get to heaven, we get to do more service to get more joy? The bible doesn't say a lot about life in heaven. All I know is that God wants us to have a joy filled life now. We get joy by having a servant's heart in all aspects of life as we use our lives to make a difference in the lives of others. If you get that, you get what being a servant is all about.
5. Gee John, that's all well and good. What's any of that have to do with Isaiah Chapter 42? So glad you asked. In effect, everything! The last chapter described why judgment of people is necessary for eternal life. This chapter asks the question, "If we're to be judged, what's the standard for that judgment?" It talks about aspects of Jesus First and Second Comings. Remember that Isaiah was written seven centuries before Jesus First Coming. Therefore, He has aspects of both His First as well as His Second Comings in view mixed in this chapter.
 - a) The point is this chapter focuses on the issue of being a servant, both as it applies to Jesus Himself as well as us. Jesus came into the world as a servant as an example for us to learn from, and He'll return to judge us based on how we acted as a servant on His behalf.

- b) Therefore, I ask you to follow along with Me as we discuss how Jesus was called to be a servant of God the Father, how we're to be servants of God and what all that means both for our future here on earth as well as our eternal future. As we read how Jesus is called to be a servant, the issue is for us to understand who He is, why He came to earth, why He has to come again to judge and what all that means for you and me. If you get all of that, you understand what Chapter 42 is all about.
 - c) With that said, time for the details.
6. Chapter 42, Verse 1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.
- a) Let's start by recalling what was said in the last chapter: The key issue of the last chapter why does God have to judge us anyway? That leads to the natural question of how does He judge us and what should we do in preparation for that judgment?
 - b) That leads us to Verse 1. Picture Isaiah speaking on God the Father's behalf. He's saying that God the Father refers to this judge as "His servant". All that means is it's the desire of Jesus to do God the Father's will. John 5:43, 6:40 and 15:10 all make similar points that the purpose of Jesus' coming was to do God the Father's will.
 - c) By the way, it's not just John who makes that statement. In the other Gospel accounts, we are told that God the Father effectively said He's "well pleased" with Jesus. (Matthew 3:17, 17:5, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22). My point is simply that we have several eye witnesses to Jesus baptism (for the cleansing of our sin) and His glorification where it's recorded that a voice from heaven announces that God the Father is "well pleased" with Jesus.
 - i) With that in mind, look at this verse again. It describes God the Father delighting in this "servant". The verse says this entity (we call Jesus) will have God's Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations.
 - ii) You might say, when did Jesus ever bring justice to the nations? Yes we can argue that those who trust in Jesus are 100% forgiven of their sins and we live "just if we have never sinned", however, I'm sure Isaiah had both Jesus 1st and 2nd Comings in view here. Remember Isaiah wrote this around 700BC. I doubt he understood of the two comings of Jesus. Isaiah just wrote what God told him to write, and we are here to figure it out.
 - iii) So how do we know the Gospels aren't just a bunch of made up stories in order to fit in with what Isaiah and others predicted about the Messiah? Both internal and external evidence support the facts. Religious Jewish people will acknowledge of Jesus existence, but deny that He is God. How does one else explain the great rise of Christianity from the first century onward despite the great persecution that did occur on and off for centuries by the Romans? Jesus is also briefly mentioned in an account of Israel's history at that time by a historian named Josephus. My point is simply that there is great internal and external evidence that the accounts of Jesus as given in the Gospels are accurate based on internal and external evidence.
 - iv) In summary, the historical evidence is there that Jesus existed and He fulfilled this role of being a servant to do God the Father's will in His first coming.
 - d) All that leads us back to Isaiah. The verse also says that this "entity" who God the Father trusts in will also bring justice to the nations. One of the main reasons that devout Jewish people reject Jesus is that He didn't start judging the world back then. It's like saying, "We don't need want a Messiah to forgive us of our sins, we just want someone to rule over the world from Jerusalem." Unfortunately, it's not until God can Himself pay for our sins that He can begin to rule over the world.
 - i) So why has it been so long? Why wait 2,000 years and counting for Jesus to return to judge? The short version is it gives God and us time to gather in more people to enjoy that eternal relationship with God the Father that He desires. That's why we are to be of service to Him until that time of His return.

- e) To finish up this verse, realize this one verse tells us of what Jesus did and will do in both His First and Second Comings. He came to be God the Father's servant to do His will. His will was to teach us how to be servants to God the Father, for Jesus to pay the full price of every sin we ever have committed or ever will commit, and trust that He is God and He'll return one day to judge the world based on God's standard for living as given to us in the laws of God.
 - i) So does all of that mean we have to say, eat kosher until Jesus returns? No, many of God's laws were specifically for the Jewish people. Many are for all people. For example, I'm sure stealing, murder and adultery are still "on the books". The book of Acts Chapter 15 clearly states that God doesn't expect non-Jewish people to live like them in order to please Him. We please God by studying His laws as a guide to how we're to "separate ourselves" from how nonbelievers live and be a witness for Him to the "lost and dying world" of people. We all need to draw closer to Him to draw upon His power so that together we can make a difference for Him.
 - ii) OK, that's the Gospel message in one paragraph. Time to come back to Isaiah.
 - f) Last question on these verses: How does Jesus judge the nation anyway? Does everyone line up one at a time or one group leader at a time? What about all the leaders who have past away? Is it a judgment of the past, present or future? The answer is all the above. I don't know how that many people are judged simultaneously. That's why I like to argue that when people are judged, their eternal bodies will exist in more than three dimensions so that many can get close to God at the same time.
 - g) OK, enough of the speculation, let's get back to Isaiah.
7. Verse 2: He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.
- a) First realize Matthew quotes these verses in Chapter 12:18-20. Therefore, Matthew argued that Jesus is the fulfillment of these verses.
 - b) With that said, let's focus on Verse 2 for a moment. When it says, He will not shout or cry out, does that mean Jesus never spoke loudly during the time of His ministry? I'm sure at times when there was a large crowd, Jesus had to speak loudly for people to hear Him.
 - c) My point is when it came to judgment, Jesus didn't have to "make a big stink about it", but only to tell people what was wrong with the way they were living at that moment. If you think about it, Jesus judged all the time. He constantly told the religious leaders how they were blowing it by trusting in their own good deeds and not God's standard of perfection in order to be with Him forever. My point is Jesus didn't "chew people out" when He was judging. He just told them what was God the Father's standard for living and how they're blowing it by trusting in their own works to prove their worth to God.
 - d) That leads to the illustrations Isaiah gives in Verse 3. A reed is a vine that grows. Picture a bunch of reeds that grow in shallow water. If you ever touched one, you'd be aware of how easily they break. Again, I don't think Isaiah is being literal, as much as He's giving us an illustration of how "gentle" God is in His justice. As to the wick example, picture a wick in an oil lamp. All it's saying is Jesus will be so gentle in His justice it would be as if He never has to manually put out that wick in an oil lamp.
 - e) So if Jesus is that gentle, how does His laws get enforced? In other words, if someone will be condemned and Jesus says "Your guilty", who's the enforcer that puts people in hell? I would argue that people at that moment won't have a choice. They'd be taken away by an angel and effectively given what they want: A life without God telling them what to do.
 - f) All I'm saying is a way to recognize all this justice when it occurs, is we won't see Jesus as He "pounds His fist" saying, guilty as charged, off to hell you go! Next? He'll be judging people based on our faithfulness in service and our trust in Him to guide our lives. Those who don't want God to rule over their lives, "Get what they want" for all of eternity.

- g) Another question to ponder is, "Won't all this get boring after awhile?" After all if Jesus is busy judging person after person or one group after another, won't that wear Him out? If God is God, He doesn't get tired. Notice Verse 4 says, Jesus will not get tired until there is justice over all the earth. So how long will all this take? No idea, that's why I like the idea of people existing in more than three dimensions as I see it shortening the time process of how long all of this takes.
 - h) Let me put it this way: Does God the Father ever get tired of answering people's requests for help and guidance? Of course not. Does God get bored with our existence? Of course not. A God that's eternal doesn't get tired or weary. That's the point of Verse 4. However there is a second part to Verse 4, that I'll take on now:
8. Verse 4 (cont.) In his law the islands will put their hope."
- a) If you were with me in the last lesson you might recall that I didn't like the word "islands" as a translation. The King James translates it "Gentiles" which is closer to the thought. All I'm saying is the word "Islands" refers to the non-Jewish world that puts their trust in this Messiah for judgment. I like the translation "distant lands" from Israel's perspective.
 - b) Stop to consider how Jesus was originally an obscure figure from an obscure religion if we consider the number of people in the world at that time and the number of them who did believe in the God of the bible. All I'm saying is from that relatively obscure background, we get a world wide religion that multitudes of people believe in. Even if the majority of religious Jewish people don't believe Jesus is God, they have to admit, that the Gentiles of the world have adopted what came from Judaism as Christianity is a dominant "player" in the world. All I'm saying is the intent of this verse is true that the God we believe in is the hope for mankind.
 - c) The underlying point here is to consider just how well Jesus fulfilled this role in both His First appearance and I'm sure will fulfill it in His Second one as well. That's why we read of Matthew quoting all of Verses 2-4 in His gospel account, as Matthew understood how Jesus did fulfill that role perfectly of one who is gentile yet judges at the same time.
 - d) So is this judgment strictly eternal? Of course not. If you're trusting in Jesus as being the Lord (in charge) of one's life as well as being God, stop and consider how our behavior is changed based on that belief. My point is we trust in that judgment to be true and we do change our lifestyle based on that judgment. All I'm saying is we as Christians realize we will be judged based on our behavior, which is why we choose to live as servants of Jesus as opposed to only living to please ourselves.
9. Verse 5: This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:
- a) Verse 5 has two of God's names here to start. The idea of both words is that He's the one who created our world to begin with and "He is that He is", meaning effectively God is in charge, deal with it! This verse is essentially a reminder that God created the world that we live in, He gives us all life, so whether we like it or not we have to accept whatever it is He decides when He judges us. No we can't fully comprehend how big God is or how He made our world, but life is too complicated to just have "sprung up all by itself" so we do accept the idea of His existence. That leads to the natural question, if He exists and He is in charge, what does He want of us? To be a witness for Him and humbly live as servants to make a difference for Him in the world we live in.
 - b) However, I'm jumping ahead of what Isaiah wants to say to us here. Think of Verse 5 as an introduction of God to us. It's kind of like saying, "since it is obvious that a God must exist that created all things, here (the next set of verses) tell us what it is God expects of us as His witnesses for Him. The short version is that God wants to "open our eyes" to what He desires of us, and that He wants to give us the power to make that difference for Him. With that introduction complete, time for Verse 6:

10. Verse 6: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.
- a) First question, who is the "you" in these verses? Even religious Jewish people will argue it refers to the Messiah, but they deny it ties to Jesus as they will argue another Messiah will come and rule the world from Jerusalem. My response is do you think another person of Jewish origin will attract more Gentiles than Jesus? They'll argue no, but that there will be another Messiah to rule over the world in the day when all this begins. At that time, there will be a Messiah who the world will be forced to accept as the king.
 - b) As the classic joke goes, when the Messiah comes, religious Jewish people will ask, "So is this your first visit or your second?"
 - c) All of that leads me back to these verses. I'll argue that the "you" does refer to Jesus as He was called in "righteousness" (think "right way of living"). When Verse 6 says that He will hold His hand, is it being literal? It's a word picture of the fact that the entire time of Jesus ministry was to do God the Father's will. "Holding your hand" is a picture all parents can relate to of guiding our children to go the way we want them to go. It's the idea that Jesus only did what God the Father wanted Him to do, and "that's that".
 - d) This leads to the important question of "light to the Gentiles". If it sounds familiar, that is because the New Testament (Particularly Romans) spends a lot of time arguing that Jesus is the "light" of the Gentiles. While that phrase is not quoted exactly, what's implied is the idea that Jesus isn't just the promised judge of the Jewish people but also that Gentiles will also look to Him to judge the world.
 - e) OK, so how do we know Jesus is the one? Look at the evidence as laid out in the Gospels in comparison to what's being predicted about Him? Has anyone else in the history of the world ever made blind people instantly see? Yes it's both literal and figurative. It's literal as it's among the miracles Jesus did to prove who He was. It's also figurative, as people's eyes are not opened to the truth of the Gospel message unless God's the one opening one's eyes to begin with. That's the idea in effect that only God knows who is eternally saved.
 - i) What about prisoners being released? Yes, it's again both literal and figurative. In the book of Acts we read of the apostles miraculously being set free from prison.
 - ii) It's also "freeing" in that once we realize we're no longer held captive to sin, we too are made free. There are many Christians spending the rest of their lives in prison for crimes they've committed, yet I'll argue they're more free than most people as they realize they're eternally free from the sins they've committed.
 - iii) When people figure out Jesus is God, and change their lives accordingly, it is as if they've (we've) been released from prison as they're no longer just living to satisfy their own needs, but we experience the joy God the Father wants us to have with a relationship with Him and by helping other people.
 - iv) Now that "that's settled" about how Jesus sets us free and opens our eyes, Verse 8:
11. Verse 8: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.⁹ See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."
- a) Verse 8 is not an egotistical statement. This is not God saying, "I'm God, deal with it." It's a point for us to remember. Remember that when Isaiah wrote the land of Israel was full of statues of idols that represented their gods. I recently heard a lecture from a missionary to a country in the South Pacific and he described how household idols were common in that area. My point is we may call them by different names, but people trusting in "good luck charms" in one's home or car is still very common throughout the world.
 - b) The point as it relates to "service" is that we have to remember who God is and what it is He desires, a life of service to Him as we make a difference for Him in our world.

- c) My point is the reason this verse is for us to remember that God called us to separate our lives for Him. That just means we should be living differently enough so that if we we're on trial for being a Christian, the evidence would convict us. Examples of living that way would be if is we don't have any shrines to any false Gods in our lives.
 - d) Let me put it another way: Do I have a problem with Christian bumper stickers? No, if it is being used as a way of telling others that one is separating themselves for God's use. If one keeps a statue or a picture of Jesus in one's house and one bows down to it or prays to that picture, then that's an example of idolatry. God wants us to pray to Him and not to a representative of what we think He might look like. If we are keeping a little "something" as a good luck charm around our house or car, that's an example an idol if we are trusting in that "thing" to bring us good luck,
 - e) All I'm saying is even those of us who are Christians have to careful to avoid "idols" in our own life. Just as God was calling the Israelites of Isaiah's day to avoid idols, so God's also calling those of us who are separated for His use to not have our own "idols" around.
 - f) That leads us perfectly into Verse 9. Verse 8 in effect is asking the questions, "Why should we trust in God for guidance and not idols"? The answer, as strange as it may seem, is the topic of "prophecy". All I'm saying is that if God's perfect, that means He knows all things and what's more important is that He tells us "the end from the beginning".
 - i) Let me explain that better. Does that mean God lets us know exactly how long we are going to live? Of course not. Does that mean He lays out for us in advance all the things we're going to do in our lives? Of course not. The best way to see how God is working in our lives is to make the effort, hopefully by doing the things we enjoy doing anyway and we can see Him working in our lives.
 - ii) The point of Verse 9 is that God wants us to realize that our world started when He made it and our world will end when He says so. There is nothing the "global warming" crowd or the "nuclear bomb" can do to change that fact. God said that a world will come one day where Jesus rules from Israel all over the world and there is nothing we can do to change that destiny.
 - iii) Yes great and horrible things occur in this world. Wars come and go. People will continue to live and die. Tragedies will happen. Despite all of that, Jesus still asks us to use our lives in service to Him so that people's eye's may be opened and they will be released from the prison of only caring about themselves as we realize that the greatest way to live is to make a difference for Jesus in the world around us.
 - iv) That leads me back to the point about prophecy. The reason about 30% of the bible is predictions is so we can know for sure that Jesus is God and that He's aware of all of human history before it occurs.
12. Verse 10: Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. ¹¹ Let the desert and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. ¹² Let them give glory to the LORD and proclaim his praise in the islands.
- a) Ever stopped to consider why do we sing in church? Does God have a big ego where He needs to hear us sing? We don't sing songs to God for His sake, but for ours. It's a way to remind ourselves who's really in charge of our lives and what it is we're grateful for. It's a way of being of service to Him as we praise Him for the good He's done in our lives.
 - b) Notice the verses are geared toward non-Israelites. As I've been saying a lot as of late, the idea of "islands" is a metaphor for distant lands. The general idea is that Isaiah desires the people of the world honor God for who He is. Isaiah gives a few examples of places near where He lived as being the "ends of the world". That included deserted areas as well as a group of wandering nomads, which is probably the reference to Kedar. Sela was a city in what is today Jordan. It's just Isaiah's examples of the "world" singing praises to God.

- c) Stop and consider how many billions of people around the world today take time out of their lives to sing praises to the God of the bible. My point is even though that comment by Isaiah wasn't meant as a prophecy, consider how Christianity has grown as an offshoot of an obscure religion in the Roman Empire to one that dominated the world. Therefore as Isaiah is telling the "islands" (remote parts of the world from Israel's perspective) to praise the God of the bible, stop and consider how literal that prediction has come to pass.
 - d) Last question to ponder here, why does Isaiah pause from describing God's judgment for all people of the world to give a "praise fest" for a few verses? What do these verses have to do with the topic of judgment or our service to God? Yes of course, when we're singing praises to God that is a form of service. Besides, these verses are a prediction of growth of those who serve God. These verses remind us that despite Israel's tough future, (from the perspective of Isaiah) it's another reminder that "God's going to win in the long run" as we today have multitudes of people worshipping Him as God.
13. Verse 13: The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.
- a) In earlier verses we had references to the fact when the LORD comes, He'll be so gentle, He will not break a reed that grows in the water. Yet here in this verse, we get the same entity "marching like a mighty man...shout...raise a battle cry". So what is it?
 - i) The way I view the return of Jesus as the Messiah, is He'll conquer the entire world based on who He is. I believe the saints (us) return to rule with Him when all this does take place. The way I reconcile these two ideas is that it is God's nature to be gentle with us. When you study the events of Jesus First Coming, it appears as if He is always in control of the situation and we rarely read of Him being angry. I believe God is always angry at sin, but always has love for the sinner who wants to repent of their sins.
 - ii) The point is God will only tolerate sin for so long. When you study the lives of the kings in say 1st Kings through 2nd Chronicles, God only tolerated the evil ones for "so long". In fact offspring of those kings usually got less of a time span as if God's saying, "you should have learned from the consequences of your father." So what does this have to do with Verse 13? It's that God will only tolerate sin "for so long" until He returns to do something about it.
 - iii) Let me explain this concept another way: Why can't life as we know it continue to go on forever with some being saved and some being not saved? Why does Jesus have to return to set up His kingdom? Yes I know He promised to do so, but what I'm getting it is the concept that God only lets evil exist for "so long". Just as those who do horrid things eventually die off or get killed, so God can't let this world go on forever as it is. That's why there's some unknown day in the future where Jesus returns to set up this kingdom.
 - iv) The idea of Jesus getting excited as described in this verse is the reminder to us that He'll win in the end and it'll be a shout of triumph over the world's evil.
 - b) Let me bottom line this one more way: The reason we should bet on God is that His word has been 100% accurate to date with predictions about the future. Therefore we should be trusting in His word for what it says about how the world will end as we know it.
 - i) So what should we do in the meantime? Serve Jesus. Let me give an example:
 - ii) I recently heard a sermon by a famous pastor in my area. He recited the number of people who die every year in my state. It bothers him "to no end" that most of those people will go to hell because they refuse to believe that Jesus is God. Then he told the story of a Jewish woman who asked him point blank, does that mean I'm not going to heaven? Instead of starting a "your opinion versus my opinion" answer, he put the burden on Jesus by quoting Him saying, "No one comes to the father except by Me". (John 14:6). The point is we "servants" tell others of Jesus.

- iii) Grant it, not all people have a gift of evangelism. Still, all us believers should be able to explain why we are saved and why we believe Jesus is God. People can't argue with a personal testimony. From there, it's a matter of using the gifts we've got to make a difference for Jesus in this world.
 - iv) OK, I got off topic there. Let's get back to Isaiah.
14. Verse 14: "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.
- a) An image that's common in the bible is to compare a major coming event to a woman who is about to give birth. That's because most people can relate to that image. When a child is about to be born, there is a lot of pain being expressed while that event occurs.
 - b) All I'm saying is Isaiah's using that image to describe how God's being very patient with this great event, but it'll occur one day like an event that builds momentum until the big moment arrives.
 - c) OK, it's been 2,700 years since Isaiah wrote this. Even if we understand that Jesus said He was going to return, that's been 2,000 years. How do we know this event will still happen one day? My favorite answer is look at the Israelite nation. No other nation has ever been scattered and came back together again to form a nation. Yet Israel has done it twice. All I'm saying is the modern state of Israel is a proof that the God of the Israelites is still there controlling our world and still working out His plans for our salvation.
 - d) Even if that doesn't work for you, consider that if Jesus came back 100 years ago, none of us would be alive to appreciate it or use our lives for His glory.
 - e) Anyway, I think the "birth pains" are finally coming to an end as a lot of the signs are now in place for the great "wrap up" that the bible spends so much time discussing. With that said, let's move on to Verse 15.
15. Verse 15: I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.
- a) A good question to ponder is when will all of this judgment take place? There is no place in the bible where we get any clues as when all of this judgment begins. In fact Jesus even said no one know the day hour except for God the Father. (Matthew 24:36.) Even though the bible never says when it will happen, we get lots of ways we can recognize this event when it occurs. For example, you might recall a passage from earlier in this book where Isaiah said, "the wolf will lie down together with the lamb". We'll know when all of this happens because life on earth will change dramatically.
 - b) Speaking of dramatic changes, that leads me to this verse. When Jesus returns He will lay waste the mountains and the vegetation will dry up. Rivers will stop flowing. The point here is simply that it'll be obvious when all this judgment begins because life on earth will be so different that we can easily recognize changes to the topography.
 - c) OK how does any of that affect us now? Because life will change that dramatically it tells us that we should have a "light touch" on this world, because it won't last forever. All the time we use making a difference for Jesus will last for eternity. All things we'll do us will only last one lifetime. My point is simply that we should be using our lives in service for God because the world as we know it won't last forever. Living to make a difference for His kingdom will last beyond when all these changes take place.
 - d) The verse before this one reminds us that all of this will occur like a "pregnant woman as she's going into labor". It starts with birth pains and then the dramatic event happens. It is the same with the changes to the world of Jesus' return. All that we have to remember about this verse is that dramatic changes to the world will occur when Jesus returns to the world and we should be living our life with the expectation of that event. It doesn't mean we should panic that all this will occur one day. It means we use the most valuable thing we are given, our time, to make a difference for God's kingdom. That's what our "service to God" is all about, using our time to make that difference for His coming.

16. Verse 16: I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.
- a) You might recall that earlier in the chapter we had a passage about when the Messiah will come He will make the blind to see. While there is some literal aspect to that idea as Jesus did give eyesight to those who were literally blind, only a small percentage of the world is literally blind. The main application is about the change that occurs to us when we accept the idea that Jesus is God and change our lives accordingly.
 - b) All I'm saying is when we become Christians, for most of us our lives change dramatically and we would do things we would never do if we never made that choice. I can't describe all the life stories of all believers. All I can do is use my own life as an example. I wasted a lot of years before I gave my life to Jesus. Now I dedicate a lot of my time so I can make a difference for Him. Not everything I do is perfect or works out the way I desire it to go. All I know is that God leads me down "unfamiliar paths" as I use my life for His glory. It is as if He makes the "rough places smooth" as I make the choices I make to use my life for His glory. So am I saying this passage is pure "spiritual"? Of course not. I'm positive that when Jesus returns there are literal aspects to this verse that occurs. I also know that He's guiding me down paths I never would have gone in life.
 - c) Remember that this verse isn't so much about you and me, but about Him. Jesus is the one who will do this when He returns to earth. Again, think of this verse as another clue as to recognize when all of this will occur. At the same time, if we our desire to follow Him, we know He can "open our eyes" to walk down paths that one way or another do glorify Him as we use our lives for His glory.
17. Verse 17: But those who trust in idols, who say to images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame.
- a) Verse 17 is the contrast to Verse 16. To people around the world who trust in things other than the true and living God will suffer eternally for that choice. The issue isn't about the truly naïve, but those who are aware of His existence, and make the choice to turn to other things to trust in for joy in this life. Let's be honest, lots of people are very aware of Jesus and who Christians claim He is, but still want to prove their worth to God based on how they live their lives. Remember I talked about the pastor who knew the number of people who die every year in my state? Realize God wants us to have that same attitude toward the "lost", as one's we should help before they throw away the time they have left to live.
 - b) All I'm saying is it's not just "way back then among the Israelites that people trusted in the things other than God", it occurs all around us today as well as back then.
 - c) Remember that the bible is not written so much for nonbelievers as it is for believers. This is one of many verses that says to the Christians, someone took the good time and trouble to share the gospel with us so we can draw close to Him. That means God desires we take the time and trouble to lead others closer to Him as well. We shouldn't think a thought of their loss as "too bad for them", but instead, being a good witness to others so they are not going to spend eternity in "utter shame" based on the choices they make. I suspect we've all made choices we regret and still do things we know aren't pleasing to God. He doesn't expect perfection, but effort based on the fact we are saved. The question for Christians is not that we're saved, but what are we doing with it? That question is the basis for how we get rewarded in heaven based on the opportunities God laid in front of us to be a witness for Him and how we reacted to those opportunities. All I'm saying is if you want a reason to use your life as God's servant, realize our eternal rewards depend on that decision!
 - d) I'm the first to admit, I make mistakes all the times and one's that I know are costly. At the same time, I can't change my past just learn from it. Since we can't change our past, all we can do is use some of the remaining time God has given us to make a difference for Him. In effect that's the point of this verse as it applies to us believers.

18. Verse 18: Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing."
- a) Remember that Isaiah is talking to his fellow Israelites. He's the one calling them blind as well as deaf. I admit at first glance, these verses appear to be insulting to us. It reads as if it is calling those of us who have committed our lives to Jesus blind and deaf. That is not what these verses are saying. It's saying to those Israelites that God's called to be a living witness for Him that they are effectively blind and deaf. It may help to think about these verses in context of the last one. In Verse 17, God's condemning people who turn to other things for spiritual guidance. In Verse 18, the focus is on the Israelites.
 - b) It may help if I paraphrase the thought here: "Hey all you people that I have called to be a witness for Me to the world around you. You are wasting your lives away and effectively you have become blind to what I desire of you (being a witness for me) and deaf to what I have called you to do: Live differently enough from the world around you so that others will know that you are using your life as a living witness for Me."
 - c) With that said, let me "modernize" this for many Christians: You go to church on Sunday but you don't do what I require of you. You know that I expect you to use your life to be a witness for Me but instead your only using it for your own pleasures. It's as if you have lost your hearing and eyesight. You see needs all around you to help others so that others can be drawn to Jesus or closer to Him, yet you waste away your life on meaningless stuff.
 - d) I can just hear a lot of you saying, "We'll that's not me. I give money to my church and I'm doing good things for others." First, that's great and I'm not condemning that. All that I'm saying is that God cares how we use our time and that many people who claim they have given their lives to Jesus will lose what eternal rewards they could have earned because of wasting one's life away on things that don't eternally matter. That's the idea behind these verses.
 - e) OK, now that I've scared everyone half to death, we can move on to the next verse.
19. Verse 21: It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.
- a) The New Testament is very clear that we Christians are not saved based on our obedience to God's laws. It's only about faith in who Jesus is that gives us our salvation. If all of that is true, what's the purpose of God's laws for us? They are designed to guide us as the best way to live our lives. Remember how I said a way people will know we are believers is if we live differently enough that the evidence of our faith should convict us if we're ever on trial for our faith? That's what God's laws do: Show us how we should be living based on the time God's given us to live. Let's put it this way: If we steal or murder, most likely we will have to suffer the consequences in this lifetime. When we decide to use our lives as a witness for God, we just want to obey His laws, not to earn favor with Him, but because it becomes our desire to want to please Him in all that we do. It's not to earn rewards in the next life as much as it is wanting to show gratitude to the God who saved us from what is the penalty for our sins.
 - b) Short version: We desire to obey His laws as a witness for Him and not "earn points".
 - c) So does that mean we have to eat kosher and wear beanies on our head? As I said earlier in this lesson, Acts 15 make the point that Christians are not expected to live like a Jewish person does. I'm sure for example, "murder and stealing" are still on the books. The point is simply that the New Testament is our guide to interpreting all the Old Testament laws as to how God wants us to obey them.
 - d) Want to make this simple? Live one's life as one believes God would want us to live it. If we make it a point to study our bibles daily, God will guide us as to how He expects us to obey His laws and how they apply to our lives today.

20. Verse 22: But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, "Send them back."
- a) By now hopefully we can see how Isaiah's going back and forth between how those called to be a witness for God are acting versus how they should be acting. It's as if we are being lectured on the topic of "You should be doing this, but instead you're doing that". All of us are being given the "unpleasant reminder" that God's called us believers to live differently from how nonbelievers live, so that we use our lives as a witness for God. That's the idea behind this lesson and why we're called to a life of service for the entity who created us in the first place.
 - b) With that tough thought completed on this verse, Isaiah's describing his fellow Israelites as if they are plundered (lost whatever possessions they had) or are hiding in a pit or are rotting away in prison. Yes the Israelites are soon to be conquered by the Babylonians. In that sense these verses are literal enough that several generations after Isaiah would know he was a true profit of God as this literally came true.
 - i) Picture an Israelite roughly 100 years after reading this, who's now somewhere in the vast Babylonian Empire. After they've lost all they had, there is no one to say to them, "send them back", as they must live out their lives where they were.
 - ii) All that I'm saying is this verse came literally true. It also has implications about an eternal judgment, which I'll discuss next.
 - c) What's important is to realize why those Israelites were taken into captivity to begin with: For turning from the God who created them in the first place. The point for you and me is that God will harm us just as easily if we fail to use some of our time as a witness for Him. It's that tough reminder that we Christians are not to be wasting the precious gift of time, if we are of service for Him. Think of it as the "carrot and stick" lecture. We get rewarded in heaven for making a difference for Him and or we'll suffer eternally if we fail to use our lives as that witness for Him. That's effectively what Isaiah's trying to preach to us.
 - d) With that thought in mind, Isaiah's going to finish his point over the next three verses as he finishes his little lecture here on the criteria for God's judgment of us.
21. Verse 23: Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? ²⁴ Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law.
- a) It would help to keep in mind that when Isaiah wrote this, it was around the time when God wiped out the Assyrian threat and Babylon was not a significant player on the scene yet. Most of the Israelites living around Jerusalem back then were thinking, "God won't wipe us out because His temple is here and God promised that David's descendant will rule from here until the Messiah comes. The whole idea that the Southern Kingdom will be destroyed and taken away captive was not accepted. Therefore, many of the Israelites went on with their lives as if, "Why worry about the future, God's going to protect us!"
 - b) That in effect, is why God's judging those Israelites. They were so busy going through the motions of what God required without really caring about Him. Household idols existed all through that kingdom as people were either trusting in other gods or just giving God a bunch of "lip service" without living as He required them to live.
 - c) Which leads back to you and me. The last thing Jesus wants of us is to think, "God's going to do what God's going to do, so I'll just live out my life the best I can, honor Him by only going to church once a week, but never put any real effort into being of service to Him by using my time to make a difference for Him". Just as those Israelites who lived way back suffered a form of group judgment for turning from how God expects them to live, so we as Christians can also suffer "group" judgment if our church, community or nation fail to live as God desires we live. Yes we may be eternally saved, but that doesn't get us out of any group judgment if we fail to use our lives to make a difference for Him in our lives.

- d) If this whole lesson scares you, it should. That's why the expression "fear of the Lord" is a commonly used one in the bible. God spends a lot of time telling us both the benefits and the punishments associated with using our lives as a living witness for Him. Of course we are eternally saved if we trust that Jesus is God, He's in charge of our lives and we accept His payment for every sin we ever have or ever will commit. The important question that we need to ponder is, what are we doing with that knowledge? Are we using the time He has given us to be of service to Him or are we just using our time to benefit ourselves? It's that tough question that's being asked over and over again through this lesson.
 - e) So are you saying I should feel guilty about not doing enough for God? I've heard of some Christians on their deathbed who live with that fear. They're afraid they need to do more before they die and they'll lose heavenly rewards for not doing enough. I can almost hear God saying to them, "Stop worrying you've done all that I've called you to do, you'll have a great reward in heaven now stop panicking that you haven't done enough." I believe it's the same sort of lecture that God gives to many of us: If we've committed to give some of our time to be service to God and we generally make the effort to honor him whatever the amount of time we have left to live, I'm convinced that God's effectively saying to us, you have done all that I've asked you to do, now stop worrying and enjoy the time you've got left to live as you continue to receive joy by being a servant for Me.
 - f) OK, enough of the "carrot and stick" lecture on serving God, I've got one more verse to go.
22. Verse 25: So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart.
- a) Verse 25 is an epilogue to what happened to the Jewish nation when they were destroyed by the Babylonian army. Remember that Isaiah's writing history before it occurred. He's essentially saying, "The Israelites didn't listen, God had to punish them as it was the most merciful thing He could do at that point because they refused to honor Him as God. They had to suffer if for no other reason than to be an example for us of the consequences when we fail to use our lives as witness for God when we are called to live that way."
23. Want a summary of this lesson in one thought? The greatest way to have joy in this life is if we're willing to use it to make a difference for God. That's how we'll get rewarded in heaven, and we'll get joy in this life as we use it to be of service to others and when we're hurting, we'll let others be of service to us. We can suffer in this lifetime if we fail to live as God desires we live, which is the idea of being of service to Him through others, and we can lose eternal rewards by not living as it is He desires we live, which is putting the needs of others as priority over our own needs. That is what Isaiah's being trying to communicate in this chapter.
24. With that said, time to close in prayer.
25. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you've paid the complete price for our sins. We don't have to worry about not being good enough to be with You in heaven. However we need Your help with the concept of using our time to make a difference for You. Make it obvious to us how You desire us to live as a witness for You. Help us to use our time to give us joy, endurance and patience as we use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.