

A new label

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Date: 22 February 2026

Preacher: Robin Silson

[0:00] And before we read it, I just want to remind you of this passage because it really flows out of what we looked at last week. Which was Isaiah 53, a very famous passage that talks about the servant of the Lord who is Jesus Christ.

And 600, 700 years before this would happen, it talks of what will happen to Jesus. And what flows on in the next two weeks, really, as we finish off Isaiah, it flows out of that that is true. It flows out of everything in response to the objective reality, the historical fact of Jesus suffering for us. Jesus taking up our pain, bearing our suffering, who's punished by God for our sins, who's pierced for our transgressions, who's crushed for our iniquities, that the punishment is on him to bring us peace.

It flows straight out of that. That our debt is settled because of the cross of Jesus. That's what it flows out of.

And so we're going to be thinking about that. But let's read today's passage and then I'll pray. Isaiah 54, the whole chapter, page 742, this is God's word.

[1:23] Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child. Burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour. Because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband, says the Lord.

Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide. Do not hold back. Lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left.

Your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. Do not be afraid. You will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace.

You will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your maker is your husband.

The Lord Almighty is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back.

[2:25] As if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit. A wife who married young only to be rejected, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you. But with deep compassion I will bring you back.

In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer. To me, this is like the days of Noah.

When I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you. Never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken.

Nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you. Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted. I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise.

Your foundations with lapis lazuli. I will make your battlements of rubies. Your gates of sparkling jewels. And all your walls of precious stones. All your children will be taught by the Lord and great will be their peace.

[3:35] In righteousness you will be established. Turinu will be far from you. You will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed. It will not come near you. If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing.

Whoever attacks you will surrender to you. See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to wreak havoc.

No weapon forged against you will prevail. And you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.

And this is their vindication from me, declares the Lord. Amen. Let me pray. Almighty God, we come to your word and we want to hear from you.

We pray that you would speak to us as a corporate body, as a congregation, but also individually. You know the circumstances of our lives. You know our emotions and where we're at.

[4:42] You know everything about us, even the hairs on our heads. And so we pray that you would speak to us intimately and encourage us and build us up and correct us, train us in righteousness. Rebuke us if needed so that we, your servants, might be equipped for every good work.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. So as I say, everything that we look at this morning, it flows directly out of the fact that we are forgiven in Jesus.

Everything that we are to live out of is based on the historical objective reality. The facts of the cross. Not anything that's subjective.

Not a feeling. And yet I think that the problem that we might have is that we often think that our feelings make a difference to how we live than actually what is objectively true.

The facts. And I want to talk this morning a little bit about that's kind of how we form our identity. About what we feel rather than what's true.

[5:50] Who we are, we base on what changes. It's like we change our clothes. You think of clothes, what you decide to get dressed in, the labels we wear, actually they do tell something or even the style you have.

They say something about the person sat next to you. If you're always dressed in sports clothes, it kind of communicates. It's something different than if you're always dressed in kind of high-end fashion.

It says something. Coat clothes, whether we realise this or not, broadcast something about who we are. Whether we're consciously doing that or if we're aware of it.

The reason we know that is because the moment we change our clothes, kind of, it disappears, doesn't it, what we were saying. It's a temporary label. It's just an illustration because the reality is this is true of we do this everything in part of our lives, you know.

Our career, what we've chosen to do, we form our identity, who we are based on the job we have and how many hours we work. Not just career, but the parenting style that we choose or the size of the house or the community or the village we've decided to live in.

[7:06] It's kind of an external sticker on your life that says something about you and it's kind of how we form our identity. Here's where the problem lies.

If your identity is based solely on those external stickers, what happens when they peel off? What happens is they leave you exposed and frantic, trying to find a new identity that will stick.

And so when the bottom drops out of, I don't know, this doesn't happen, but if the bottom drops out of your career and that's who you are, then you'll be exposed, you'll struggle.

If your kids don't turn out with how you wished for them and that's part of who you are, if there's a problem, you know, if you lose your house or whatever it is, it becomes a problem because it's not something that is, it's not really a foundation that you can build anything because it's so easily changing.

It's subjective, it changes. But here's the reality. There's a different reality, a sticker that doesn't ever change for anyone who puts their trust in the servant of Isaiah 53.

[8:34] If you're a person that's put your trust in the servant Jesus, the one who Isaiah 53 points to, what that means is that you have a new label, a true identity that doesn't depend on circumstances, but it is true of you objectively regardless of how you feel.

Your identity is bought and paid for in full by the wounds of the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom.

And so this morning as we look at Isaiah 54, there is an invitation to everyone this morning, it's a gospel invitation to change how you live.

Not to live by those external labels, not to live as who you're trying to become, as what you think matters to your life, but actually to live as who you are and who you always will be.

It's what we might call, comes at the very last verse, it says this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.

[9:48] It's what we might call living out of our gospel heritage. Because it spells out what God's people receive, what we receive because of what his servant has accomplished, an objective reality, an identity, a new label.

Verse 17, This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me. This morning, we're going to see four ways, four things, four kind of aspects of that identity, that heritage that you receive in him.

Four things. A fruitful identity, a united identity, an assured identity, and a secure identity. These things never change.

The first thing is a fruitful identity. The first thing that you have because of the work of the servant is this is what we see. And we see that fruit that we see in Isaiah 54.

The fruit is faith. This is the faith that we have. In the Bible, faith, it's not a subjective feeling. It's not something you drum up.

[11:01] But it's believing in God's promises. It's the deep conviction that because of what the servant has done, because of the cross, it's the belief by looking back at what Jesus has done, that your promised future is more certain than what you see today.

Having that type of faith is God producing spiritual fruit in you. And it's what the living God kind of commands in many ways of his people, to believe in something, to believe in a future that is promised to you, even though things in your own life might be tricky and difficult.

On a human level, believing in that doesn't actually make any sense. And that's something that we see in verse 1, that he commands something of Israel that doesn't make any sense.

Look with me in verse 1. He says, Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child, burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour. Those two things don't seem to correlate, do they? Because the way that he's describing the woman is something that is of deep pain. And without faith, this instruction doesn't make any sense. But with a fruitful identity, it doesn't look at the circumstances.

[12:24] In this case, he says that Israel is personified as a barren woman, normally a source of pain and sorrow. No, he's saying it looks with the eyes of faith that God says, this Israel is unfruitful, but with the eyes of faith, barren Israel, the barren woman who never bore a child, will have more children, verse 1, than the desolate woman who has a husband.

See the second half of verse 1? More are the children of, because more are the children of the desolate woman than her, who has a husband. The answer of faith says, the barren woman will have more children.

How does that make sense? It's like, you can imagine this, just an illustration, it's like a future husband beginning to kit out the baby room, buying the cot, choosing the wallpaper, picking the nursing chair, even before he's even got married.

It doesn't make any sense. But he believes it so much, his faith so much in that, that he's going to have it, that he gets it all ready. It's the fruitful response of faith.

It's a statement of certainty. God isn't saying, maybe this will be your future, Israel. It's the prospective husband, saying to his future bride, this is your future.

[13:52] You know, the nursery's ready, because the outcome is certain. This is your heritage.

People of God, we sing, not to get attention, not as wishful thinking, but because of a certain trust in God's promise. In our future, faith means, verse two, enlarging your tent, because the children, before the children are even thought of, and with faith, when we know the character, and the power, and the miraculous work, of the God of the Bible, with faith, living like it, is actually the logical thing to do.

Because the living God, is already treating Israel, as the mother, of his future children. And the future children, will be many.

Faith is looking at the unseen, what looks ridiculous, it looks ridiculous to the world, saying, barren woman, and believing in that for yourself.

It's looking at situations, in our own life, where we say, no, how could that possibly be, how do I get out of this? I'm in a mess, things are difficult, and believing in God's promises, for the messes, that we find ourselves in.

[15:16] For the situations, where the world doesn't have an answer. And believing that God's promises, will prevail. That's the first one, a fruitful identity.

The second one is, a united identity. This is where we're kind of going to, pivot a little bit. Because what we see here, is why this permanent union, is brought about.

Why is this, why this permanent identity, happens. And how, the permanency of this identity, actually kind of brings healing. The kind of metaphor, that we have, and it happened in our reading, earlier on, is that, and we've also touched on, you know, marry, is the, the relationship to, a man and a woman.

It's marriage, the defining metaphor, probably I think, through the whole of the Bible, of what it means, to be connected, in relationship, with the living God. Yet what happens, is because of, as we read this, I think, because of our, mistakes, and the difficulties, maybe in human marriage, it is kind of easy, to, transfer our own experiences, our own human feelings, and failures, to the relationship, we have with God.

You know, this time, the labels, it's kind of the labels, we wear, and maybe the things, we've experienced, go much deeper, than what people, can see on the outside.

[16:47] It's not just, actually labels, about our career, or job, or, things like that, but, labels are also, beliefs, that we might have, about ourselves.

Maybe there's, hidden sins, perhaps there's, mistakes we've made, many moons ago, and, and we also, wear, the labels of shame, and rejection, and the memory of them, cuts us, deep.

What we read here, is that the memory of those, has made Israel believe, that, the, the marriage, between the living God, and Israel, has kind of been dissolved.

This is, it's exactly what Israel, believes about themselves. Look at how the living God, addresses, his bride, Israel. Look at me, verses four, and five. He addresses, the primary thing, that is keeping them, from believing they belong to him, their past.

He says, do not fear, you will not be, put to shame, do not fear, disgrace, you will not be humiliated. Here we, he says, you will forget, the shame of your youth.

[18:01] He says, I know, like, I know in the past, you've made a mess, but, but, but you will forget it. Go, just leave those things behind.

And, and here is where, in the midst of all, all this, it's kind of, where we see that, the, the gospel kind of, shining through. Because, the gospel, what the gospel says, is that these identity labels, of shame, and rejection, of, disgrace, humiliation, that these identity labels, never stick.

Because, they're subjective, because they're based on feelings, and circumstances, there is no permanence to them. And, the basis of that, the basis of that, is, is verse five.

because, even despite all that, what does the living God say to Israel? He says, for your maker, is your husband, the Lord of hosts, the Lord almighty, is his name.

we get this, stunning, combination, of the God, who's all powerful, the maker, the creator, of the heavens, and the earth, power to create, and yet, deeply intimate.

[19:30] The one, who holds the blueprints, of the stars, the architect, of the laws, of physics, who knows the depths, of the cosmos, and at the same time, the microscopic detail, in every human cell, your maker, he's also the one, who has bound himself, to you.

It's the doctrine, or the teaching, of being united, to God. And what that means is, you don't have to dress up, to belong to him.

It isn't about, any external labels, that you have to present, yourself, acceptable, because they don't matter. He didn't find you, when you looked, spiritually fashionable.

No, he saw you, at your worst, and he called you, to himself. That's what we see, in verse six, the Lord, will call you back, as if you were, a wife deserted, and distressed, in spirit, a wife who married, young, only to be rejected.

You can picture it, you can imagine, a woman grieving, cast off, no hope, thought she'd, found the love of her life, only to be, left, disheartened. What the living God does, is he reaches into, that subjective grief, the circumstance, that feels so real, and speaks a word, that is true reality, he calls you back, no longer the outcast, but recall, to belong, to the Lord, your maker.

[21:04] And how is it possible? We just go back, to Jesus the servant, who became, deserted, and distressed himself.

Who, who took on, our identity, of rejected outcast, so that we could wear, his identity, so that our rejection, would be finished, so that, in union with him, the abandonment, that we feel, was born, by the servant, on the cross, so that the call, to us, could be permanent, for Israel, but for his people, for you and me.

You are united, to your maker, and that fact, can never be annulled. It's the covenant promise. A fruitful identity, a united identity, third one, we've got an assured, identity.

It's at this point, you kind of, maybe, maybe you're asking the question, well okay, okay, I see this, you know, at the cross, but sometimes, I don't just, I don't feel, the level of assurance, about all this. How can I, how can you, how can you definitely, tell me that, I can have an assured, identity, that this is actually, going to last. And the reason, you might think that, is because, when God is saying this, to his people, their circumstances, this, remember this is Israel, but they've been kicked out, they've been, Israel is God's people, they've been kicked out, of the land of Israel, and they're in Babylon, and they're in there, for 70 years.

[22:53] And, the circumstances, that they have, in their life, it looks, like God has dropped them. It looks like, he's ditched them. It's a long time, it's a lifetime, 70 years, you can understand, why they might, not feel, kind of assured, that, maybe, his promises, are lasting for them.

That's kind of, how circumstances, in our life, grab us, and changes, and make us think, and change, we don't feel assured, by, whether we belong to him. Because circumstances happen, and it's real, and it feels like, oh man, I wonder if God's dropped me, I wonder if he's ditched me.

Verses seven, and eight, look with me. For a brief moment, I abandoned you, but with deep compassion, I will bring you back.

In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you, for a moment, but with everlasting kindness, I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. To Israel, hiding of the face, was not a metaphor.

As I said, it was 70 years, of chains and ruins. They lived that rejection, and here's the interesting thing. They should have known, that that was going to happen. Israel knew, Israel knew that God, would hide his face, if they acted like that.

[24:23] You see, there's, we, a few weeks ago, in the kids talk, we did all these different promises, covenants, and in Sinai, listen to, this is exactly what God says, to his people.

Listen, this is Deuteronomy 30, when he says this, and I will certainly hide my face, in that day, because of all the wickedness, in turning to other gods. He said, he's going to hide his face.

He wasn't lying, they should have expected it. They had every reason, to fear, that this was it for them. But it wasn't, the end of his grace.

He wants to show them, something deeper. There was a promise, that he made, before that. And that's where he goes, in the passage, a promise that he made, not to Moses, but that he made, to Noah.

Look with me, verse nine. See what he says? He points them back, to the rainbow. The promise he made to Noah. Look with me.

[25:25] To me, this is like, the days of Noah. To me, this, he's saying, what is happening, right now to you, at the end of 70 years.

This, at the end of 70 years of Exxon, reminds me, it's just like the days of Noah. He says, when I swore, that the waters of Noah, would never again, cover the earth.

So now, just like I promised, that I would never cover the earth, with water. So now, I have sworn, not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. The end of Exxon, is a reset.

It's God moving them, from a contract, conditions they had to keep, based on them, to an oath, a promise, based on him. You can see the comparison.

You see what he's saying? He's saying, that the Babylon Exon, is their flood equivalent. The flood, was a one time judgment, for the sins, of the past.

[26:21] But the rainbow, was the guarantee, he'd never do it again. And this is what he's, promising them now. Just as I swore, the waters would never again, cover the earth. I swear, I promise, that I will never, hide my face from you again.

The face hiding judgment, is done, forever. It is finished. It is an exhausted category. The question is why, and how?

How can God, with assurance, tell his people, he will never hide his face, from them again, and still be a God, who keeps his promise? He's still got to keep, the promise of Deuteronomy 31.

He can't go back, on either of them. Because he did say, he would hide his face. That's what we just saw. Surprise, it's not a surprise, because, it comes back again, what we saw, last week.

That in the servant, what Jesus took, in Isaiah 53, God hid his face, from his son. Because of what Jesus has done, you can be, assured, he didn't cancel, what he said he would do.

[27:34] He did hide his face, but from his own son. So you can be, assured. Though the mountains, be shaken, and the hills, be removed, yet my unfailing love, for you, will not be shaken, nor my covenant, of peace removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

God's promise, here rests, on the surest, foundation there is. You ever seen, an earthquake? You ever, watched the news of, I think the one, that comes to my mind, is the, this is years ago, by the way, it's like the tsunami, in, I can't remember where it was, Thailand, well done, I love, I love, congregation participation, it's brilliant, the tsunami, or the ones in Japan, where the mountains shake, the hills move, and the destruction, it brings to a city, people are terrified, there's fatalities, and sirens, those countries run drills, to keep people safe, because we know, the earth is usually, the only thing, that doesn't move, but God says, even that is temporary, but my covenant, is eternal, nothing can shake, or change, his covenant, his promise, of peace, to you, why?

Because upon him, was this chastisement, that brought us peace, when Jesus was being, chastised on the cross, the mountain, that Jerusalem is built on, literally shook, and the hills moved, the earth itself, convulsed, because the face, hiding wrath, was being exhausted, on Jesus Christ, because the earth shook, your peace is unshakable, this is your heritage, this is your identity, final one, we've done an assured identity, just now we're going, a secure identity, because of the cross, ours is a heritage, full of faith, where we're permanently, united to our saviour, with complete assurance, but there is one more thing, and that means, it's a sense of belonging, a sense of a, something that is secure, a secure eternal home, which is promised, and we see two things, about this home, that where we're, all those who've put their faith, in Jesus are headed, it's both a home of beauty, but also, a home that cannot be plundered, in verse 11, and 12, we kind of see, both things come to the, fore, it has been afflicted, it's looking at the, the destruction of Jerusalem, look it says, afflicted city, lashed by storms, and not comforted, and then here he says, he's playing with images here, that he's going to rebuild, he's talking about the broken city, but talking about it, rebuilding it in a, in a heavenly way,

I will rebuild you, with stones of turquoise, your foundations, with lapis lazuli, I will make your battlements, of rubies, your gates, of sparkling jewels, and all your walls, of precious stones, the living accommodation, of God's people, is getting a massive renovation, it's battered Jerusalem, but the, the true Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem, will be restored, imperfect, it's moving from kind of, we see the illustration, it's moving from all, you know, they couldn't live there anymore, it was so battered, they've, the people of Israel, have been moved about like nomads, it's moving from that kind of, image of a nomadic tent, to a permanent city of gems, this is the antidote, to the shame, it's the place of honour, he takes, he takes Israel, the woman who feels like an outcast, and gives her the home of a queen, she's not just tolerated, but deeply loved, and the materials, they don't wear out like a bit of old canvas and rope, they are hard precious stones, the temp was temporary, the city will last forever, it's not about survival anymore, but the glorious display, of God's brilliance, it's a home that is secure, and strong, a home is only a home, isn't it, if it's safe, our spiritual safety, is guaranteed, you see what it, we see just towards the end of the passage, we see, no weapon forged against you, will prevail, no weapon, can go rogue, against a child of God, we may, it doesn't

mean that there isn't a weapon, still will, can cause, can hurt, but there'll be no victory, with those weapons, and we see what he says, because verse 16, it is I, the blacksmith, who fans the cause into flame, and forges a weapon, fit for its work, our spiritual safety, is guaranteed, because God is the blacksmith, of the weapons factory, now that's hard, it's hard to process, because in our lives, those things feel real, and they are real, and difficult, things happen, there is, there can be, it can bring terror, and it can bring difficulty, and pain, and suffering, but what the living God is saying, is those things, as hard as they are, the enemy is a creature, but your husband, the God of Israel, is eternal, and he's in full control, of all things, it means that every tongue, that accuses us, that attacks, will one day be silenced, and our secure home, because of our secure identity, it is all proof, of the vindication, that comes from the living God himself, this is the heritage, of the servants of the Lord, notice with me, he now says, all the way through, we've had servant, singular, now we have, not just the heritage, of the servant, but servants, it is plural, it includes the whole, of God's people, and we have indicated, the case, against, any of God's people, is legally, closed, no weapon, forged against us, will work, in the way it's intended, and so as we, come in for landing, what does it mean,

to live this reality out, well one thing it means is, I think is to kind of, check our external labels, the things that we think, are important, as they, and they are, we, it's good to, we form our identity, around lots of things, but the ones that last, are the ones, that the living God, gives us in him, this is who you are today, you are fruitful, you are a fruitful, child of God, full of faith, you're united, to your maker, you are assured, because of Jesus, because Jesus, dying on the cross, for you, that is your assurance, and you are secure, with a secure future, we can act, like the bride of God, because this is, who he's made us, to be, you don't need to perform, you don't need to create, something, when, you don't need to create, kind of a, present, on the outside, something, when you already, possess, an eternal, heritage, and an eternal identity, because, this is your heritage, message, and it's not a label, that will fall off, but will, will stay, written, over your life, and, but it's written, with permanent ink, it is written, with permanent ink, it will never, this is always, who you are, no matter what circumstances, are happening, in your life, this will always, be who you are, we need the living God, don't we, to help us live, as the people, that he's made us to be, let's pray, almighty God, it's quite incredible, to, behold, what you have done, for us, and yet we know, that, sometimes the, our feelings, and circumstances, and they are real, and they are difficult, we don't want to, pretend that they're not, and that, we have real struggles, with, just like, the Israelites, this was a lifetime, 70 years in exile, and, those things are real to us, but I pray that you would, lift our gaze, to what is eternally true, that you would lift our gaze, to know that, this is not something, wishful thinking, it's not something, that we drum up, but it, the faith that you give us, is a gift, that you have united us, to yourself forever, that we have deep assurance, because of the cross of Christ, and that we are secure, by faith, of this secure, eternal, future home, that is guaranteed, and, and, in that, a place that is a, that is full of beauty, and that cannot be destroyed, can never be taken away from us, can't be attacked, but is, but is where we truly belong, and,

[37:44] I pray that you would, help us to, just remind us, that this is who we are, this is our heritage, this is our identity, this is who we are, as the people of God, and so we pray, for your blessing, we pray that you'd help us, and sustain us, with the, this mindset, of what we, think about ourselves, as we go into, another week, with lots of things happening, that you'd remind us, of who we are in Jesus, and so we ask for this, in his name, Amen.