

# Listen! Danger Ahead!

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[ 0 : 00 ] When we come to passages that are hard, we still know that this is God's word, this is God's word for today, that he's spoken and we're not scared of addressing these things that come up and so it's good and right that we approach these with reverence and expect God to speak to us even in difficult passages.

But let me pray for us before we look at it together. Almighty God, we thank you again for your word and we pray for our hearts now. We pray that you'd help us to fixate our attention on Jesus and we pray, Lord God, that you would speak by your spirit.

We pray where there's areas of our hearts that are perhaps shaken and rumbled that you would, where we're disturbed and where we're conflicts with how we think, we pray that you'd help us to be humble and help us to recognise things about ourself and things about you.

So we ask for your blessing in Christ's name. Amen. So I mentioned where this is first one back of coming into this series in Isaiah 40 to 55 and even with this section, one of the things that just to say is that this passage, it actually comes a little bit as a two-parter with what's going to come next week.

This is kind of part one, part two, even within a big series, it kind of comes as a two-parter and what we'll notice at the end of this week, it kind of leaves us hanging with the kind of resolution that we wish for.

[ 1 : 32 ] It kind of doesn't land in a place that's kind of neat and tidy, but it leaves us wanting a resolution. It's full of challenge. As I mentioned, there's difficult things to think about.

And the whole idea, one of the big things that's coming out of it is around God's law. God's law is his good law, perfect law, his rules and regulations that he gives his people to live.

The reality is, laws are good. Laws are good things. Now this is not a law, but it's just good advice. I don't know if you've ever been up to the Isle of Lewis. There's a great beach there called Dalmore. You might have been there. But nailed to the gate before you go on the beach, it reads this.

This community welcomes you to this beach and wishes to point out the danger of strong undercurrents. Then it says in capital letters, danger, strong undercurrents, be safe.

[ 2 : 36 ] The sign is there. It's not a law, but it's there written down to actually warn you from going swimming in the beach at Dalmore. Because people have gone swimming there. It looks like it's okay, but the strong undercurrents are dangerous to swimming.

It's there to protect, to warn you that there's danger ahead. If you ignore the sign, then you could get into danger. And you think the same goes for other places in the UK, things that are common.

If you go near a nuclear power station, there's a warning sign on the outside. Isn't there warning? Beyond the point, there is a radiation hazard. Do not trespass. It is dangerous. Don't ignore this sign.

If you go to Dalmore where there's military training, there's warning. Do not enter. Do not walk in the military training zone. They're there to protect us. At Dalmore, the danger is drowning.

At the nuclear power zone, you could get poisoned. At a military training zone, you could get shot. Laws, rules and regulations. This goes for God's law too.

[ 3 : 49 ] It is not there. Those three things that I've mentioned, they are not there to stifle our freedom. But they're there actually to give us freedom to live safely. To live right.

And so it is foolish, isn't it, to read a warning sign and ignore it. It is foolish to do that. In today's Bible reading that we saw, I think it was, was it seven, what page was it again?

Seven, two, nine. Stick with me in there. What we have is what happens when God's people ignore his law. When they pay no attention, when they hear it, when they have it, they see it, but they pay no attention at all.

And what the consequences are for them and how God responds to them when they ignore his law. First thing, I've said it already, that I want us to remind us of is that God's law is good.

God's law is good. Just like we mentioned, just like the laws in our world that are there to protect us, God's laws are good. They're rules and laws that are made to follow, revealed to us in the Bible.

[ 4 : 58 ] And when we read God's law, he doesn't make them willy-nilly on the fly with no thought, rhyme or reason, but they're there to bless his people. They reveal his character.

They provide a means of forgiveness. They're there to tell us how to worship. They're there to give us an awareness of our sin. They're there to make Israel and the church distinctive and attractive for people to follow.

They're good laws that are a blessing. The laws we read about here, you remember, they're given to Moses from God directly. If Israel followed it, they would be blessed.

We've seen repeatedly, if you remember, how they were called a chosen nation, a servant of the Lord, to be a blessing. We even see that in our passage this morning.

You see Israel referred to as God's messenger. What does that mean? It means that the way that Israel lived their life as a nation was to send out a message, like a huge advert to the watching world, that God's ways, living under God's rule, is better.

[ 6 : 07 ] An advert, it's better. Why not come and try it out? Now, we're New Testament believers, so we don't follow the Old Testament law in exactly the same way.

There's lots of laws, moral ways of living that still apply, but in terms of, you know, worship and ceremony and matters of civil life. Some of those laws that we read about are specific to being Jewish.

But Jesus has fulfilled the laws. He's fulfilled the law. He's fulfilled those. So we don't have to, you know, meet and worship and we don't do sacrifices or meet in a, you know, meet in a tabernacle or have a temple.

Yet, what is the foundational principle behind the law that we have to remember? The foundational principle behind the whole law is one that should be written on our hearts.

It is to love God and love neighbour. Love God and love neighbour. That's what Jesus says, doesn't he? That the whole law is summarised by loving God and loving neighbour as ourselves.

[ 7 : 11 ] Jesus has fulfilled the law superseded. He's the epitome of the law. And when we read it, it points to him because it reminds us that that's how Jesus lived. Love was the driving motive of everything he did in his life.

Love was the driving motive of everything that Jesus did in his life. Love for his father and love for his people. The law is good. In fact, you know, even the rules and laws that are mentioned before in our world, you see how in a way they're kind of, even good laws that we feel like we've made up, they relate to God's law because those warning signs at Dalmore, at a nuclear power station, at Dartmoor, they're loving.

It is a loving thing to warn somebody of danger. It's a blessing to be warned. Even when Jesus warns, he's not a killjoy, but he's showing that kind of protective parental type of love.

The law is good. Verse 21, It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness, to make his law great and glorious, to elevate it. However, there's a problem that we have, that we read, don't we? Even though we know it's good, even though God's people knew it was good, they chose to ignore it. That's exactly what we see God's people have done. What do we read?

[ 8 : 46 ] That they are blind and deaf. God's people are deaf and blind in many ways. Look with me in verse 18. Verse 18, Hear, you deaf, look, you blind, and see.

Who is blind but my servant and deaf, like the messenger I send? Who's blind like the one in covenant with me? Blind like the servant of the Lord? Verse 20, You've seen many things.

But you pay no attention. Your ears are open, but you do not listen. You see the irony.

They were called the messenger, but how can they take a message to anyone if they can't hear it? If they don't know how to live in themselves, they're messengers with no message.

It's like they've read the warning signs and take, you know, I'll take my chances. Probably, you know, let's go for a swim at Delmo.

[ 9 : 43 ] Let's see what this power station's all about. Let's go for a walk in a military training zone. It'll be all right. It's probably, like, not that dangerous, is it? The waves don't look that bad.

I don't see any tanks. It's even harder, isn't it? It's even harder if you're with a group of friends who are all up for it as well. What if you're the only one who doesn't think it's a good idea?

You have to be pretty bold, don't you, to say, nah, you know, we shouldn't. There's the signs there for a reason. We shouldn't ignore them. You do.

That would be distinctive, right? That would be distinctive. That is what God expects his people to do, to know the law. And when the opportunity is presented by the other nations of worshipping false gods, should they have not remembered what the law said?

The first commandment, Exodus 20, you shall have no other gods before me. But all their peers, all the ones surrounding them, their next door neighbours, they've got other gods.

[10:54] Do you remember getting in trouble when you were young? If you copied someone else? My mum's saying, if they jumped off a cliff, would you do that as well? Classic parent wave, if you did anything.

God's people follow. They're not distinctive. They ignore. And they're no different to the world. You have seen many things. But you pay no attention.

Your ears are open, but you do not listen. No different from the world. The Israelite nation knew God's laws. And as the church, we have his word, the Bible.

And in fact, with us, there is actually a greater responsibility. When Jesus arrives, he has this famous sermon, read it in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, the Sermon on the Mount.

And what he does there, he actually elevates the law and centres it, not only what we do outwardly, but what's going on in our hearts. He doesn't, it's not just don't murder or commit adultery, but whoever hates his brother in his heart is committing murder.

[12:01] Whoever lusts in their heart is committing adultery. We know the law. The appeal, the desires of a flesh are strong.

At times we find it hard to fight against, but there's, isn't, there's times when we ignore, we fall head over heels back in love with the sins that cling so closely.

Where does that leave us? Well, as I said, you'll notice in this passage, there isn't much of a resolution, is there? However, what we're told about the living God is no less important.

We are to revere him here. We're to respond with reverence, with awe, respect, with fear for God and his law because of his faithfulness to it.

The reason I say that is because at first you read through this and it looks like God's response to them is to turn his back, doesn't it? That's what it looks like.

[13:04] It looks like God is turning his back on his people because in verse 22 that's what it appears has happened. You look with me in verse 22. This is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits, hidden in prisons.

They've become plundered, no one to rescue them, they've been made loot, no one to say send them back. It looks like God has said, I'm not dealing with you. I'm turning my back on you.

That's what it looks like. It looks like that is what God has done. That the warning signs have not been heeded, the danger to be safe, to follow his laws have been irrelevant, they've ignored him. And you might think, I get it. God put it, that's how God put it. He turns his back on them and refuses to help. Just a reminder that what we're reading about here was, you know, this actually happened to Israel.

This is a real event in history. God's people, Israel were plundered, they were looted, they were trapped and Jerusalem was burnt to the ground. Even the temple, brick by brick, ended up as a pile of rubble taken down.

[14:11] And there were horrible things happened by the Babylonian army who came and sacked them and took them, carted them off in exile to Babylon. Horrific. So what we read in verse 25, we read, it enveloped them, it enveloped them in flames, it consumed them.

But, there is something unexpected here. Unexpectedly maybe that this doesn't happen because the living God forgets them. He doesn't turn his back on them.

No, it's the living God, Yahweh, the Lord Almighty is his name who is the orchestrator and the initiator of what happens to them. Verse 23, which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?

Who handed Jacob over to become Luke 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 so he poured out on them his burning anger the violence of war.

Now, perhaps, perhaps, we might find that shocking. But, I want to take a few minutes to suggest why actually what we read here is actually good news.

[ 15 : 35 ] Remember what we read about the Lord and his law in verse 21. Verse 21, we read, it pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.

That word for great is kind of a similar word to the word magnify. I think that's a better understanding for us. It would be better to read, it pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to magnify his law.

Like a magnifying glasses used to make things bigger, so you can, it makes things bigger and when you look at things that are small you see the detail, the clarity, you can see it and understand it more.

God's action here, what he does has real purpose behind it. It is to make his law bigger, to magnify it so that we can see it and understand it with greater clarity and detail.

that this law is good. God's actions here, how he responds to his people ignoring him, it magnifies his law because it magnifies his character.

[ 16 : 43 ] He is a God to be feared, who keeps covenant, who the whole time has been clear as dare as what would happen if they ignored him. Their stay in the promised land would be cut short, just like Adam and Eve stay in the garden.

If the living God forgets about it, what kind of a God is that who doesn't keep his word? How could you trust anything he said if he didn't keep his word to his law?

How could you trust it? You couldn't. What would that say to everyone else? What would it say if he didn't keep it, if he wasn't true to his word? Do whatever you want with God.

He'll let you off in the end if you say the right things. If you kick up a fuss and have a tantrum, he'll come round, just give him some time to cool off, he needs some alone time right now. God's not like that.

And his response to their ignorance is right. His character is upheld that he's not a God that you can mess around with, he sticks to his word and that means that we can trust him.

[ 17 : 46 ] So it magnifies his character but also it magnifies his commitment to his people. You see the living God here does not act out of spite. Fine you want to go that way, he doesn't turn his back on them.

You see there's a dual purpose in God's action here. On one level they were being punished, exiled from their homeland because of ignoring God. But you see the desire, the purpose behind it is that they see their errors and turn back to him.

To wake them up, to shake them to see the errors of their ways. He wants them to understand and take it to heart, to recognise his laws are good and better than what else is on offer. life in his kingdom, in his land is so much better.

To click, look at what we've done. We've not listened. He wants them to turn back to him. He wants them to repent. That is what God wants.

If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. God's people then?

[ 18 : 52 ] Do we see them turn back? Do we see them turn back? Does what God wants to happen, does it happen? Well, I said there's no resolution, not in this passage.

What we see is that God's people do not respond in the way that God expects. I suppose the difficulty where we have with God's word here is that it doesn't leave us with the response from his people.

We read in that last verse, in verse 25, he enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand. It consumed them, but they did not take it to heart. You see, it has no effect on his people.

No doubt, it's awful and tragic what they went through, but they are unmoved spiritually. And I suppose as we read this, this is the warning sign to us, isn't it?

That we don't want to be unmoved in life by God's word. We don't want to be unmoved by his word, or by the events in our life, or by the events in our world.

[ 20 : 08 ] You know, we can come to church, we can sit week by week, we can read our Bible every day, hang out with Christians, have an enjoyable church community, yet remain unmoved by his word.

We can hear God's word and we can even say, I enjoyed that, that was interesting, yet never consider, what is the living God saying to you?

What is he specifically bringing to your attention for you today about yourself, about me? Is he warning you about something?

Are you taking notice and what are we doing about it? Are we committed to pray and ask for God's help, to be the person that God wants us to be? Now sure, we know we can't change without the Spirit of God, it's his grace that empowers and is at work in us, but his word should prick our conscience, it should prick our conscience to invest time and effort to walk daily closely with Jesus. If we want to thrive in life, we need to read the warning signs. Don't get me wrong, we'll all do it, there are times when we'll ignore him. There are times when we'll ignore him.

[ 21 : 30 ] The only response when we realise we've ignored him is have mercy on me. Have mercy on me. If God is the one who can send an army on his own people, Israel, we must fear him.

Not in a scared way, but with reverence and awe. Have mercy on me. Withhold the punishment that I deserve. Don't correct me in your burning anger.

Help me change. Give me an attentive heart that loves your word, that hears the warning signs, that is the one that sticks out amongst the peers, that when everybody else is doing the wrong thing, that you say, no, I'm not.

I'm reading God's word and it's the source and value and love of my life. God's laws are good. It's good.

He's given them to bless us, to bless you and I, to have no other gods before us. God's love. Yet we ignore, as we come in for landing, we recognise, even in our own hearts today, probably, we know the times when we have not loved him and not loved our neighbour.

[ 22 : 43 ] We ignore, we know what it says, but we reject it. And yet, God uses things in our life to turn us back to himself.

sometimes those, and we don't want to say that every, you know, we got to be careful the way that we look at things that are happening, but God uses his word and he used moments in our life to turn us back to himself.

He even uses the big things in our world, the things that we see in our world that maybe distress us, even those things are a product of living in a world tainted by sin.

As we see those things, it draws us again, have mercy on us Lord. Have mercy on our world, have mercy as we spoke of have mercy in the Middle East, have mercy on Winsborough, have mercy on Scotland, have mercy on my family.

Turn us back to you. Let me pray. Almighty God, we love you and we praise you for sending you, son.

[ 23 : 57 ] And we're sorry. We love your word and yet, and we know that the laws that you've given us are there to bless us. And we're sorry for the times when we have ignored your word, even though we know it's good.

And we know we'll do it again. And yet we come to you in dependence and thanking that Jesus, you have taken the anger of God upon your shoulders.

us. But we pray, Lord God, by your grace that you would give us all a heart that loves your word, that loves your law, that aims to please you and are dependent on your spirit.

We can't change ourselves, we can't even be obedient by ourselves, and so we ask that you'd move us to love you and love your law. We ask for all this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.