

Isaiah 48:12-22

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- [0 : 0 0] So we did look at the beginning of Isaiah 48 last week. Today we're in Isaiah 48, starting at verse 12. It's on page 736. So this, I don't know if any of you recognize what it is.
- I think it's probably one of the most desperate images this year. It is a picture of thousands of Palestinians attempting to flee Gaza.
- Now you can see how long that line goes. That is thousands and thousands of people attempting to flee a war zone.
- It's fleeing people, innocent, who have been caught up in the crossfire between Hamas and Israel. That's what we're looking at. Tens of thousands fleeing a war zone with everything of their former life left in tatters.
- If you've seen the pictures, I mean parts of Gaza, it doesn't resemble a civilized place anymore. It just looks like every building has been completely destroyed.
- [1 : 1 2] And so it's kind of right, isn't it, that you would want to get away from that. Home's destroyed. Livelihood's gone. They're doing anything they can, leaving their whole life behind to get away from danger.
- I don't think, or we can see it on the news, I don't think we can actually imagine what it would feel like to be a part of that. Maybe we could try. What it must have been, the despair, the horror, the fear, the restlessness.
- Fleeing in that instance, it's not actually optional, is it? It's a kind of a necessity to get a place of asylum, of refuge, because the scale of it is just a proportion that we just don't see.
- These images, they're very recent, they're very raw. But they do help us. And I think they help us, in many ways, to get an idea of what people throughout history have faced, you know, on smaller scales perhaps, during times of hostility, brutality.
- And I think it helps us, because it puts a face to what that kind of is like. I think it helps us consider what Israel must have felt like living in Babylon, but unable to flee.
- [2 : 4 0] Oppression, despair, restlessness, no peace. That is what they would experience.
- It's into that world, the world that Israel lived in, that they constantly needed these chapters that we've been looking at through Isaiah.
- They need a message of hope. And we are no different. Like Israel, we need to hear a hopeful message. The reason we need to hear it is because actually throughout the Bible, Babylon is used actually, and it's used as a picture of what our world is really like.
- Because it's a picture of the world we're actually born into. Every single person. And just like Israel needed to flee spiritually, they needed to flee, get out of this geographical land, because they're out of their homeland, just because they needed to flee physically, we need to flee Babylon.
- We need to flee the world on a spiritual sense. And deep down, it's what everyone wants and needs. There is not a single person that doesn't know this and doesn't experience this desire at least some point of their life.

[4 : 05] You see, the reason people are fleeing, the reason they're fleeing Gaza is because it's a war zone and there's no peace. The reason Israel fled and wanted to flee Babylon is because they're oppressed and they have no peace.

The reason that we want to flee our world, the circumstances that we find ourselves in, is because there are times in our life when we feel like we have no peace. Everyone in life wants to feel and have that experience to have peace, to have peace in our world, an absence of kind of the fighting that we see, we've prayed about.

But also, we want to experience peace, not just out there, but we want to experience peace in here too. The world is restless.

We feel restless. Peace feels elusive. And maybe you've asked the question, will I ever feel at peace? True peace.

Will I ever experience that deep rest in my soul? Will the world ever know it? Well, the living God is going to, says here in this passage is significant because he presents that reality to every single person with an opportunity.

[5 : 24] You see, the opportunity is that peace and true rest for your soul is not only possible, but can be a sustained, continued, lived experience. With that in mind, let's dive into God's word.

Page 736. This is God's word. Isaiah 48. Listen to me, Jacob. Israel, whom I have called, I am he.

I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth and my right hand spread out the heavens.

When I summon them, they all stand up together. Come together, all of you, and listen. Which of the idols has foretold these things? The Lord's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon.

His arm will be against the Babylonians. I, even I have spoken. Yes, I have called him. I will bring him and he will succeed in his mission. Come near me and listen to this.

[6 : 24] From the first announcement, I have not spoken in secret. At the time it happens, I am there. And now, the sovereign Lord has sent me endowed with his spirit. This is what the Lord says.

Your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands.

Your peace would have been like a river. Your well-being like the waves of the sea. Your descendants would have been like the sand. Your children like its numberless grains. Their name would never be blotted out nor destroyed from before me.

Leave Babylon. Flee from the Babylonians. Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth. Say, the Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.

They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts. He made water flow for them from the rock. He split the rock and water gushed out. There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked.

[7 : 31] This is God's word. Amen. What we see here in our principle is the power for peace.

True and lasting peace is exclusively available only from the initiative and power of the living God. True and lasting peace is only available from the initiative and power of the living God.

He alone is responsible. And in our passage, what we see is we see that power of God demonstrated in three ways, three aspects of his power.

We see the power of his presence. We see the power of his works. And we see the power of his decrees, which we're going to briefly look at. You see, firstly, we see the power of his presence.

Look with me from verse 12. Listen to me, Jacob, Israel whom I have called. And then we get these three markers. This is kind of what it means to God to be present.

[8 : 37] When God is present, it's describing his eternal presence. Look with me. He says, I am he. That means he's the God present in time.

I'm he. But more than that, he says, I am the first and I am the last. This is a God who says, I am present now, but I hold a bird's eye view of the whole of history.

And I'm present in every moment. I was present at the beginning, the first. I'm present at the end. Every moment from beginning to end, God is present. In history, gone, he's present there.

In the present now and in the future, the beginning, the present now and the last. That includes Israel's exile, beginning and end. His presence means he has the power over it.

God has authority and power over every moment. The power of his presence. Secondly, we see the power of his works.

[9 : 43] The power of God is undeniable because of the power he has demonstrated in creation. Verse 13, my own hand laid the foundations of the earth.

And my right hand spread out the heavens. Creation is the ultimate exhibition of absolute power, isn't it?

Everything you can see and everything you can't see. From the vastness of the universe, the heat of the sun, down to the detail in every single cell.

Microscopic, you can't see it, yet perfectly ordered and repeatable and repeated by the living God with stunning accuracy. Think about your hearing.

Think about this. The ability to speak is my brain processing the thoughts that I have.

[10 : 40] So, with the sounds and words that I've learned and retained over many years, to be able to communicate with the thoughts that are going in my head to something that I can say that you can understand.

The sounds created are carried along by sound waves into your ear canal, vibrating three bones, the anvil, the stirrup and the hammer, that carry those noises through your auditory canal.

Your brain interprets those sounds as words and puts them in order so you can understand what I'm saying and it makes sense. It forms sentences. Every part of that process happening right now is created and sustained by the God who made you.

Who made your brain, who made your ear, who made the atmosphere that enables sounds to travel on the perfect frequency. From the earth to the heavens and everything in between, God laid it all down out of nothing.

His power demonstrated in His works cannot be matched. The power of His presence, the power of His works.

[11 : 55] And the final power demonstration is the power of His decrees. Second half of verse 13, When I summon them, they all stand together.

Come together, all of you, and listen. Which of the idols has foretold these things? That word for idol there is not classically what would be translated as idol.

It's actually the word, it just means these things. It's actually referring back to creation. In other words, what He's saying is, Which of these things has foretold what's going to happen?

In other words, what in the whole of creation, What in the foundations of the earth that I laid down, Has ever announced the future? The answer is self-explanatory.

Nothing ever has and nothing ever will. When God makes a decree, when He says something will happen, it does. Psalm 115, Our God is in heaven, He does whatever pleases Him.

[12 : 54] The exclusive power of the living God cannot be matched. He alone is the only one capable with the power to bring peace, To free people, of enabling them to flee.

That is His point. They're in Babylon. He's the only one capable of doing that. Verse 20, We have the commands that they would have longed to hear.

Leave Babylon. Flee from the Babylonians. Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. The command to leave cannot come from anyone but the living God, but the Lord.

He alone is the initiator and the guarantor of their deliverance. He's the only one with the power to make it happen. It's proven, we've talked before, his use of Cyrus, a foreign king.

Just to give clarity, this could be a bit confusing. Isaiah's words were written 150 years before this happened, before the event. So you might think, well, they knew it was going to be someone called Cyrus, but they had no idea it was going to be a foreign king.

[14 : 08] That's where the amazing way that he does it is. It happens. Cyrus is a simple pawn in God's plan. True peace.

Fleeing. True peace.

True peace. True peace. Is possible for us. And it comes only in the same manner from the power of the living God. Israel should have relied on who they needed to listen to, who they needed to heed.

Heed his words. Yet the fleeing, the escape, they longed for, if attempted in their own way, which they did, was never achievable. It was never achievable, which is kind of where we're going to pivot to our second point, which is the problem, the impossibility of peace.

The impossibility of peace. Peace was impossible because Israel had failed as God's people. That's the bottom line. Instead of clinging to God's commands, to his words and to his ways, Israel stubbornly hung and clung to their old sinful past, rejecting and paying no attention to God's commands.

[15 : 29] You'll perhaps remember from last week, verse 4, if you go over the page, we saw the stubbornness of Israel. See what he says, verse 4?

For I knew how stubborn you were. Your neck muscles were iron. Your forehead was bronzed. It is a picture of a nation unable to change. Like a body fixed.

You know, it's the neck made of iron. It can't turn. Stubbornly sticking, not being able to move. Stubbornly sticking to relying on themselves. It is that sin of stubbornness that made them incapable of listening, incapable of hearing and believing.

God's commands is what they were intended to be. The consequences are laid bare. Verse 17.

Look with me what happens. I am the Lord your God who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. Verse 18.

[16 : 31] There's kind of a sadness in verse 18. If only, if only you'd paid attention to my commands.

If only you'd done it. Life would have been so different. By ignoring the gift giver, the gift is no longer within their grasp.

If only you'd paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river. Your well-being like the waves of the sea. The gift of peace.

Their well-being. Their righteousness. It was there for the taking. Like a Christmas present ready to be unwrapped. And not just on offer for a passing moment.

No. Hear how he describes the gifts on offer. Like a river that continues to flow downstream. Like waves that continue to hit the shore day after day.

[17 : 34] These were gifts that would remain as certain as the tide comes each day. Like sitting under a waterfall where peace and rest and well-being flow over your head forevermore.

You're constantly hitting you. Israel longed for this. We long for this. And yet it's out of our reach. You can feel the tension, can't you, both the Israelites for ourselves.

The desperation is heightened. Without the Lord's intervention, fleeing from Babylon, peace and well-being is a pipe dream. They are stuck and we are stuck. Verse 22.

There is no peace, says the Lord for the wicked. That word for wicked is just the same word for guilty. There is no peace for those who have ignored God who are guilty of sin.

We crave the same peace that Israel craved. The same well-being. The same righteousness. Every single person craves it. Let's just pause.

[18 : 39] Let's just back up for a moment. And I want us to just reflect. In fact, it's an important question is kind of, you know, talking about peace, the desire for it. What do we actually mean by peace? It's an important question.

Because how the world defines peace is different to what the living God means. You know, in the world, what we tend to think is that peace is kind of the absence of conflict, of fighting.

It's the absence of war, of restless noise and struggle. It's quietness and deep calm. The problem with that way of thinking is that peace becomes entirely based on circumstances, dependent on them.

Peace lasts until the next conflict breaks out. It's momentary. Until the next difficult circumstance. Until the next turmoil that you go through.

If that's the type of peace we desire, which we do, don't we? Two things. The first thing is we'll be disappointed because we'll be in and out of peace all the time as our circumstances change.

[19 : 58] The other thing is that we've actually set our sights too low. Because the peace that God offers supersedes that in a huge way.

We all want inner peace. We all want the desire to end the restless internal fighting that goes on in our mind. And that battle for your mind feels real, doesn't it?

I'll tell you, it certainly feels real to me. Peace in our world. It is an enigma. We've, you know, we've been singing about it for 60 years.

Not going to do it. John Lennon made millions off of. Imagine all the people living life in peace. Give peace a chance. Peace between nations. Peaceful relationships. We want peace, but it remains elusive.

The reason is because we've misunderstood and not grasped what true peace is. And at the heart of it, it's the belief that the reason, because of the misunderstanding, what we've gone to believe is that our plan for peace is going to work.

[21 : 09] That if we fight and wage war against the intrusive thoughts in our mind enough, then we can sort of bring it about ourselves.

That we can bring peace into broken relationships. That we can sort out the problems in the world with our own methods. That maybe and maybe perhaps we can even sort out the problem with peace with God.

Babylon, as I've said, it's just a signpost to what our world is like. It's the world we were born into. A war zone surrounded by the enemies of God.

And we're on the front line. Sin, the world, the devil are warring against God and against us. And we want to be set free from it. The escape and the rescue we need is from a spiritual war zone.

And it feels like there's no refuge. And so what we do is we trade the river of God's peace for the stagnant pond of our own control. And wonder why we feel so restless.

[22 : 12] We need what Israel received. But one so much better. Verse 14. The Lord's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon.

His arm will be against the Babylonians. I, even I, have spoken. Yes, I've called him. I will bring him and he will succeed in his mission. It's referring to the foreign king Cyrus.

But we need more than a chosen ally. We need the better Cyrus. You know, the living God sends us the one he loves to carry out his purpose, not against Babylon, but against spiritual Babylon, our world, and to succeed in his mission.

Peace becomes not just a possibility, but a certainty with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is the mechanics, maybe you want to say, of how the gospel works.

You see, the gospel, what we see, is a reverse escape. It's a reverse escape that brings peace. Because the good news is that the Son of God flees in reverse. We want to flee the war zone, Babylon, our world, for peace and refuge and safety.

[23 : 35] Jesus Christ fled his own kingdom. He fled heaven, the place of peace, of refuge and safety, into our spiritual war zone.

Verse 16, what do we see? Now the sovereign Lord has sent me, endowed with his spirit. Jesus is sent by the spirit of the Lord, full to the brim with the spirit of God.

The one who knew perfect peace subjected himself to a life, to a place of zero peace. And when he comes, he succeeds where Israel failed, where we have failed, by perfectly paying attention.

Verse 18, to the Lord's commands. And not just paying attention to them, but achieving and obeying them. Achieving, actually, the requirements for peace. Verse 18, if only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river.

Your well-being like the waves of the sea. Your descendants would have been like the sand. Your children like its numberless grains. Their name would never be blotted out, nor destroyed from before me.

[24 : 40] You see how this all works out at Calvary? Because we talked about it with the kids. It's the act of substitution. Where a guilt-ridden, wicked, where a guilt-ridden, us who are the guilt-ridden full of sin and our own, the line of wickedness that goes through every human heart, where Jesus is substituted in as punished as a guilt-ridden wicked man.

That one action, that one action secures our ability to flee from the spiritual war zone. The wall of hostility between ourselves and God is torn down.

We're given peace with our Creator, peace with the living God, and we're transferred spiritually to have peace with Him. And the peace, this does not define the way the world defines peace.

No, this peace is a peace that the world cannot offer. In Hebrew, it's this really full word. It's the word shalom. And it's so much more than merely not fighting with God anymore.

You know, not fighting with God anymore, that would be a truce with God. We don't just have a truce with God. No, we have wholeness and completeness and harmony and perfect right relationship that can never be threatened and where He approves of you unconditionally.

[26 : 18] It is robust and never altered by circumstances. You see, peace is knowing the Lord's love and forgiveness for you every day that never diminishes.

You have peace with God. Peace with your Creator. The one whose opinion is the only one that really matters.

That is a settled, complete wholeness of existence. Where you receive unconditional love is the basis of the peace that you have.

Guaranteed by His finished work. The living God grants us heavenly asylum papers. They give us permanent residence. Now, I know the questions that we have from that.

Because I ask the same questions. These are questions. I think they go like this. If I have peace with God. If I have peace with God. If spiritually I fled the war zone.

[27 : 31] I fled Babylon, the world. If I belong to the kingdom of heaven where peace is the status quo. Why don't I experience it in my life? This is where we're presented with the opportunity.

Where empowered by the Spirit of God. In union with Christ. In light of the cross. We get to experience the peace of God. Peace from Him. That comes because we have peace with Him.

You see, there is a difference. Peace with God is a status. It is a defined, unchanging reality. That circumstances do not affect.

It is the peace that says, if God is for me. What can be against me? The peace of God from Him is different.

Peace from God is the action of living in that security. Living in that secured peace. That secured shalom. That secured wholeness of identity.

[28 : 38] That you have been given a purpose. To be a child of God. First thing to say.

The full experience of peace that we long for. That full, complete experience of peace. Total, lasting and forever peace. Will only come completely when Jesus returns.

And when He calls you home. When that day happens, there will never be a day of no peace. That's the complete understanding where we'll experience it forever. With no interruptions.

But, we still live physically here in the world. Spiritually, you belong to the kingdom of heaven. The spirit of God dwells in you.

But physically, you still live here. While we wait for full deliverance into the new heavens. There is only one response. Experience in peace.

[29 : 37] Experience in peace. Is not something really that you can just wait to happen. It's something that we've got to fight for. And the only way that we can fight for it is if the spirit of God lives in you.

You see, the presence of Jesus living in you empowers you to fight for the experience of the lived reality.

The fact that you have God, but you want to experience it in your day to day. You can fight for it by the power of the spirit. You have peace with God and out of that reality you're empowered to fight for it.

You're empowered by grace. And it's never something you can ever do in your own strength. But in Christ you can. And it begins with prayer. Philippians 4. Famous verses.

Do not be anxious about anything. But in every situation by prayer and petition. With thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God. Which transcends all understanding.

[30 : 42] The shalom peace. It transcends all understanding. It's not the peace of the world. It transcends understanding. That peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I want to give you two examples of what fighting for peace might look like in your life.

If you're fighting for inner peace. Here's what a practical prayer might look like. Lord Jesus. My mind is restless.

I feel at war internally. No matter what I do it never seems to change. I know that I'm inadequate of thinking differently about the situations in my life.

Only with you can I experience the peace that I long for. The peace of God. Guard my heart and my mind with your peace. Because I can't do it myself.

It's the first example. What about if the lack of peace is not the internal thing that's going on? What if the lack of peace is a broken relationship with someone else?

[31 : 49] A friend. Your spouse perhaps. And you're in conflict. You know. Fighting for peace is not gritting your teeth. Get mad or get even is just like adding petrol to a flame.

It's the same practical solution needed. Pause them to pray. Lord I have peace with you now. Please grant me the peace from you.

To guard my heart and my words right now. That's how you fight for peace. And we must fight for it.

If we rely on ourselves we're like sitting ducks. It sounds exhausting. But Christ is our captain. He's our commanding officer.

When we call on him he's waiting in the headquarters. Already filling the supply line with what we need. To keep on living on the front line as his people. He supplies it because we're connected to him.

[32 : 52] Peace is what we all long for. It's what seems elusive. But Christ leaves the kingdom of peace. And as the spiritual war zone. At the cross it looks like he's lost.

But in rising to new life he secures our spiritual VE day. He secures our freedom. The war zone is no longer our home. And if you're here today and you've never known this peace.

There is an invitation for you. To stop fighting against God. And by faith receive the peace with God. That Jesus bought you at the cross. He offers you full asylum and permanent residence in his kingdom.

Today. In Christ peace is promised. Fight for it. Keep on fighting. Pick up the spiritual weapons. The word of God and prayer.

Knowing in union with Christ. Peace will flow like a river. Like a waterfall. It will drench us. Let me pray.

[34 : 04] Almighty God. Lord. I thank you that. In the gospel. Because of what you've done. Because you swapped.

Residents. In the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of peace. And took up home in our world. You went from a peaceful existence to no peace.

And had zero peace on the cross. I thank you that because you've done that. We who are born into this spiritual war zone.

That you can transfer us. That you can. We can leave. And flee. Our world. Babylon. And have total and lasting peace.

Shalom. Wholeness. And completeness. The peace that knows that your love. Is not dependent on how we live. But because of your goodness and grace.

[35 : 04] And so I pray that we would experience that. I pray that you'd help us. Fighting for peace sounds exhausting. It sounds like something that we're inadequate to do. And we are.

But we don't have to rely upon ourselves to fight. We rely on your spirit. That empowers us. To pray. To keep on praying. Even when we feel like we don't want to.

Even when peace feels elusive. And like it's never going to come. And situation after situation keeps coming. And so I ask you Lord Jesus. That you would empower us by your spirit.

To keep going. To keep fighting. To help one another to fight. For peace. In the power of the spirit. Would peace flow like a river.

Like a waterfall. Would you let it drench us. I thank you that this is possible. Because of. The gift of peace possible through. Your son.

[36 : 01] And so we pray for mercy. Pray for peaceful relationships with one another. We pray for your blessing. We ask for this. In the name of Christ. Amen. Amen. Thank you.