

The mystery revealed

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[0 : 00] Turning back to Isaiah, which we've been looking at over the last few weeks. I'm going to pray. Lord God, we thank you so much for your word, the Bible.

And we thank you so much for your word, the Bible. And we thank you that this is the way that you have designed or ordained to speak to us. And so we pray for all of us now sat here this morning that we would hear your voice and that we would respond in faith and that you would do a powerful work by your Holy Spirit as we listen and we are zoned, as we think about you and ourselves. Would you change us and mould us and fashion us and would you draw praise out of us to you? We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. It's a reminder of where we're at in Isaiah, chapters 40 to 55.

Israel's still in Babylon. It's after the exile but written ages before by Isaiah. There have been so many promises that we've seen over the last few weeks that living God made to his promised people.

Last week was a special promise. You might remember a special promise. The words they were longing to hear ringing in their ears. One day, Israel, you will go home to Jerusalem.

[1 : 17] That is what they longed to hear. That is something that they could hold on to. Even if it came in ways that they never expected. And yet, as good as that promise is.

The promise we're going to see God speak today is grander. It is bigger than even they had imagined. That God will surpass their return to Jerusalem.

Filling Jerusalem was, you might say, a micro project that points forwards to the end goal. The ultimate filling.

The ultimate restoration project. The plan not just to fill Jerusalem with his people, but to fill the whole world full of God's people. His worshippers.

He expands the horizons to Israel and ours actually of what is possible. Now, I don't know what you're like if you easily get impatient.

[2 : 18] I think most people have a problem with patience at some point or another. Because an impatience, really, it's not a new problem. But the thing with being impatient, isn't it?

The longer you have to wait, the greater the impatience. And there is, I don't know about you, but there is always with me the snapping point when the wait becomes too long and you think, you've just got to take things into your own hands off then.

I can't wait any longer. We see that here. Israel want to know that God's plan is progressing. They want to see that.

They want to have assurances. They're getting impatient. They want to have assurances that he will fulfill his promises to them. That there is movement towards completion.

Especially when it doesn't look that way. When they would have done things differently. When they're confused by his methods. What they want is specifics and details laid out from God.

[3 : 19] What they'd really like is God's day-by-day plan laid out like recipe for a cake. That they can follow step-by-step. Each day laid out. I think that we, at times, we would like that too.

The same mindset. You know, sometimes we know that of God's plans to do things. But we want assurances, don't we, from God that everything is going to plan.

We'd love to know that for the church. But we'd also love to know that for our own lives. Wouldn't it be great? Wouldn't this be great for your own life? If you knew the pitfalls and the trials that were waiting for you ahead of time.

Wouldn't life be easier if you just had your life laid out like a step-by-step recipe book. Of what was going to happen tomorrow. Or the day after that. Or next month. Or you could be informed about what's going to happen.

And when it's going to happen, you could make plans to avoid it. When we demand, this is the issue. When we demand to see God's, sort of, a recipe of God's plan for history.

[4 : 28] It's not just a sign of impatience. What it actually is, it's a subtle form of unbelief. Because what it implies is, this is what it implies.

It implies that if we knew the plan, that we might suggest some edits. We might veto a step that involves suffering or waiting.

You see, our desire is to unravel the mystery of tomorrow. The mystery of what happens in life. We'd love to unravel the mystery.

And when we do that, it's often a desire to take the pen from God's hand. And write a story for our lives that we think is better or safer.

God doesn't give us a recipe book. He doesn't give us a contents page of our lives, of the way, or even the world, of how he's going to ordain and sustain and plan the whole of the created order.

[5 : 31] He doesn't give us step-by-step instructions of what's going to happen, of how our lives are going to pan out. That remains a mystery. And it remains a mystery because he knows better.

But, he does tell us the end goal. There is a day when we will have our cake and eat it. That is not a secret.

It's known. It has been revealed. The end goal, what we're going to see, is to fill the earth with his redeemed people. You know, the cross is not actually the end goal.

The cross is not actually the end goal. It's actually the means by which the living God fills the earth. And it's the assurance that you will be stood in that crowd with the multitude of worshippers.

The opportunities today is to reshape our thinking. If you've ever felt exhausted from trying to predict the future, if you're weary from the mental gymnastics of what-if scenarios, God offers us a way to live with peace in the middle of life's unanswered questions.

[6 : 46] You know, he invites us to find our rest, not in knowing the future, but to trust him with it. Let's read God's word.

Verse 14. This is what the Lord says. The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and those tall Sabeans, they will come over to you and will be yours.

They will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, Surely God is with you. And there is no other. There is no other God.

Truly, you are a God who has been hiding himself, the God and Saviour of Israel. All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced. They will go off into disgrace together.

But Israel will be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation. You will never be put to shame or disgrace to ages everlasting.

[7 : 52] This is what the Lord says. He who created the heavens, he is God. He who fashioned it and made the earth, he founded it. He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited.

He says, I am the Lord and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret from somewhere in a land of darkness. I have not said to Jacob's descendants, seek me in vain.

I, the Lord, speak the truth. I declare what is right. Gather together and come. Assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.

Declare what is to be, present it. Let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago? Who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me.

A righteous God and a saviour, there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved. All you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked.

[8 : 59] Before me every knee will bow. By me every tongue will swear. They will save me. In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.

All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the Lord and will make their boast in him.

God's end goal is to fill the earth full of his people. That plan is made known over time.

It's made known over time. Yet all plans, don't they? All plans take time to reach completion. To go from the beginning to the end.

I've never been to one. And I don't know if you have. But I want you to imagine that you're going to a Michelin star restaurant. You get there. You read the menu.

[10:01] Everything sounds amazing. Culinary sensations cooked by one of the finest chefs in the world. That meal is like nothing any of us could put together ourselves.

There are techniques and ingredients used that you wouldn't dream of touching. But you don't need to know how it's made, do you? All you need to know is that when it comes on your plate is what the menu tells you it's going to be.

That's the end result. Little do you know how much planning it took for the creation of that dish to go from ideas inside the chef's head.

You know, the inventing and testing and toying with flavours. Until it ended up in something that will liven your taste buds. It could have taken months to get this dish from just a brainstorm and an idea to what will end up in front of you.

So careful planning from beginning to completion needed a plan. The living God's plan for humanity is not just something that took a few months.

[11:06] But the plan, from beginning to end, that spans the entire human history made before the creation of the world. And yet, it is only in time that we see his plan coming together, step by chef.

Like a chef creating a dish step by step that we have no idea about. The steps God takes to complete his plan are not made known all at once.

We only see them once it's happened over time. Yet, from the off, the end result is made known. God makes known what the end goal will be like.

The end goal has actually never been a mystery. It's like a waiter explaining the menu to you. This is what you're going to get served.

You expect that. God told Israel that his world would be full of worshippers. He told them that almost from the very beginning. Look with me, verse 18.

[12:06] That's what we hear. We hear the living God reminding his people that what God was going to do has never been a mystery. End of verse 18, we see it. See, he says, I am the Lord, and there is no other.

Then he says, I have not spoken in secret from somewhere in a land of darkness. I've not said to Jacob's descendants, seek me in vain. I, the Lord, speak the truth and declare what is right.

And here we have it again. But I think this brings it more powerfully. Second half of 21. See what he says? Who foretold this long ago?

Who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there's no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior. There's none but me. What is he getting at?

Well, this is exactly what God promised to Israel's ancestors. Hundreds of years before. First book of the Bible, Genesis. Abraham and Jacob.

[13:08] Genesis 15. What does God promise to Abraham? God promises to Abraham to make his offspring, his children, as numerous as the stars in the sky. That promise is repeated to Jacob.

And that the promise will extend beyond Israel's bounds. Genesis 35. This is what God says to Jacob. He says, I am God Almighty.

Be fruitful and increase in number. And then he says, A nation and a community of nations will come from you.

The promise he made way before. It's never been a secret. He always made it known that people from every nation, he says, to Abraham and to Jacob will inhabit the earth.

Never a mysterious secret. And yet, from Abraham onwards, the steps to get there remain a mystery.

[14:06] No one expected Moses, a murderer. No one expected Rahab, a prostitute. Nobody expected King David, the weak young shepherd boy.

Nobody expected that. The hows of how to get to the end remain a mystery until they'd happened. And certainly not, as we saw last week, Cyrus, the king of Persia, who never acknowledged God to be God's instrument.

It's confusing, isn't it? It is confusing. When you see a master chef at work, you can't always understand the culinary techniques used or the obscure ingredients.

But the master chef has the big picture in mind of how the culinary sensation that awaits is going to take shape. Something that we wouldn't understand.

He's implementing the recipe, this months of work, the recipe in his mind and his plan to create the dish is coming out perfect. It's only when you taste the meal that you understand the master chef knew all along what he's doing.

[15:14] It's what Isaiah gets. A sneak preview. This is a taste of what is being cooked up. What we read in this passage, that it's a taste of what is going to happen in the future.

It's prophetic. This is a taste that God is giving assurances in time that his plan is on course. Verse 15. Look with me.

Isaiah to God. Truly, you are a God who's been hiding himself. The God and saviour of Israel. The ways have been hidden. The end is known, but the ways have been hidden.

And through time the steps are made known. And what we see is not only, I mean this is magnificent what God is doing. Not only is God using Cyrus to restore Israel.

You remember Cyrus would, a pagan king who would actually fund the rebuilding of Jerusalem himself. Not only is he going to use Cyrus for that, but he will use Cyrus to draw in the nations around him.

[16:20] Look at what's happening in verse 18. Not verse 18. I think it's verse 14. We read of what will happen.

The people from Egypt, from Cush, that's Ethiopia. And the Sabaeans, that's modern day Yemen and Eritrea. See what it says? End of verse 14.

They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying surely God is with you and there's no other God. There's no other, there's no other God. The nations will acknowledge that Israel have had it right all along.

There's no other God but the living God of the Bible. Verse 20, what does he say to them? He says, gather together, come, assemble, fugitives from the nations. Come, join Israel in worshipping me.

Verse 23. Before me, every knee will bow. By every tongue. By me, every tongue will swear.

[17:22] They will save me. The nations will save me. In the Lord alone, our deliverance and strength. God uses Cyrus not only to re-inhabit Jerusalem, but to draw in the pagans to himself.

The mysterious ways of the Lord to populate the world with people from every nation. Nation. And yet, this is only a sneak preview of what God is cooking up.

This is like waiting for your meal and being invited to go into the kitchen and being allowed to taste the soup. It's going to be, or to taste the sauce that's being made.

It's a sneak preview of what God is going to do. The finale of this will come when every knee bows to Jesus. We're still waiting for that.

We're in this story. Because we're step by step till the worshipers fill the earth. We're still waiting for that to happen. And we will savour that day.

[18:25] Philippians 2. We started off with it. And the whole point of what Paul's doing when he writes this letter to the Philippian church, he's lifting this text from Isaiah.

He's saying everybody's going to need to bow the knee to God. Well, Jesus is the living God. And so everybody will bow the knee to him. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and on the earth.

And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. God's plan was always to fill the world full of his people who will bow the knee to his son.

How that happens was a mystery. And as we await that day between now and then, we still don't know, do we, how God's going to do that. You know, we think that when things are a mystery that makes it hard, but actually, the mystery is actually a good thing.

It's a grace to us because if we knew every trial, if we knew every heartache and every loss that lay ahead, the weight of it would crush us.

[19:38] God, in his wisdom, gives us enough light for the path today. Asking us to trust that the one who holds tomorrow is good and is for us.

And yet, even though we know that that's true, the uncertainty of tomorrow is still where the problem lies. It's why Israel had a problem and it's still why we do too.

The problem is we want to know the mystery. We want to know the how of God's plan. We want to know it on the macro level, but we want to know it in the detail for our own lives as well. We want to know God's secret will.

His secret plan for our lives that he doesn't reveal. We want to know that tomorrow will taste good.

We're tempted to believe that life would be so much easier, like we said at the beginning, if you were given a summary every morning of your next 24 hours.

Maybe even a heads up of how you're going to be tempted and the bad news you're going to receive. We're tempted to think it would be easy if we had time to prepare for the unexpected.

[20 : 47] Maybe make proactive steps to limit the impact it has. That belief promises security, but it delivers only anxiety.

Because the mystery of life will always shatter our carefully laid plans. The mystery of life will always shatter our carefully laid plans.

The more we try to control, the more out of control we feel. I once knew a Christian woman. When she spoke, it sounded like she had amazing faith.

But she wouldn't make a decision unless she felt like God had told her to do it directly. Even down to choosing a sandwich.

She believed that she had to ask God to show whether she should choose tuna, cheese or ham. And she would go with whatever she felt like God was telling her to do.

[21 : 49] Now, that sounds wonderfully spiritual. But God doesn't reveal those things to us. It sounds super spiritual, but it actually, you dig a little deeper, it actually shows a lack of faith.

You know, it's like your parents still telling you to cross the road when you're 25. You know, you don't need that. You're mature enough at 25 to be able to cross the road.

God doesn't reveal that level of detail. You know, faith means trust when you don't know the outcome. But knowing that God will hold you regardless.

There's two ways that we typically respond to life's mysteries. The first, and one of these, I fall into probably the second category.

The first one is to compensate the lack of control by overplanning for every unknown. Making precautions for every possible eventuality. Living like that becomes a prison of perpetual anxiety.

[22 : 55] Mind always racing, never be able to rest in the present, constantly trying to manage the future. That's the first one. The second one is actually the opposite.

It's pretending that those things that might happen are not important to all. Put your head in the sand like an ostrich. Avoid details as a way to escape.

No planning at all. It's a different prison. It's the prison of denial. Always running from reality until a crisis will hit and then completely unprepared to handle it.

The problem could be characterised as this. The problem is that we stand in the master chef's kitchen.

We look down at the meal being worked on when it's half finished. Ingredients we never used. Techniques we never heard of. The noise, the din and the heat. And we look at it and it seems to us like the master chef doesn't know what he's doing.

[24 : 01] That he doesn't know what he's cooking up. What a mess he's made. What a mess we think God's making of his plan. And so we grab our own ingredients.

We can pick up our own pots and pans and attempt to make the Michelin starred menu ourselves. Just in case his recipe fails. Just in case God's plan doesn't work out.

Or we get overwhelmed. We run out of the kitchen. Pretend the meal's been prepared for someone else. And do one. Deny reality. And escape. Both are a rejection of the master chef.

Both are a rejection of God's ways. His wisdom. And his trustworthy. And the thing that's going on in our hearts. God doesn't have a handle on this. Because we need to jump in or pretend it's not happening.

This is where we need to come back to the gospel isn't it? Because the gospel. The good news. Is actually the revelation of the mystery.

[25 : 07] It's actually the revelation of how God will do things. For centuries. How God would save the world and fulfill his promise. Was the ultimate mystery.

Prophets long to look into it. But it's the cross of Christ that reveals it. The most public declaration God has ever made about his love. His justice and his plan of salvation.

While his daily providences. His daily plan in our lives is hidden. His redemption is now fully exposed for all to see. Jesus' death and resurrection is the means by which the earth will be filled.

And it's through Jesus who is a descendant of Abraham. He's one of the stars that's promised. He's one of the seed. The offspring of the ancestor. All the promises that are made to Abraham find their yes in Jesus.

Heaven and earth populated with God's children as numerous as the stars. And you will be stood there. You will be stood there among the masses.

[26 : 13] You will bend the knee. Life may be uncertain. Tomorrow you don't know. But there is one thing you can be certain of. Your future is secure because Jesus spilled his blood for you.

See what that means for today? Because our eternal future is secure, so is your tomorrow. The mysteries of life, the uncertainties, need not be viewed with suspicion or anxiety, but as an opportunity to trust God.

When the world says you need to stay in control, Jesus says, it's taken care of.

The cross is the moment when the master chef serves up his culinary masterpiece and he says, come and taste and see that I'm good. Be blessed and take your refuge in me.

So how do we live this out? Living this out is a choice every morning.

[27 : 23] Living this out is a choice every morning. As your feet hit the floor from your bed, you can choose one of two paths. You can demand to know the mystery that just leads to a day of anxiety, control and exhaustion.

Or walk by faith. Begin by saying, God, I don't know what today holds, but I know whatever happens, you hold today and you hold me.

The cross tells me my future is secure, so I will trust you with the next 24 hours. A simple prayer that changes everything. The opportunity to trust God in the unknown of our lives.

We can live with great freedom, not with the shackles of worry. The uncertainty of tomorrow. And maybe, perhaps, maybe this is an invitation to take a first step in that direction.

Why not name and confess the one mystery in your life that you try and find the hardest to control? Your children's behaviour. Your finances.

[28 : 30] Things that you wanted that have never materialised in your life. Whatever it is, you can confess that you've attempted to push the master chef out of his kitchen.

It is an act of faith to give that one thing into the hands of the God who loves you and ask him for the grace to trust him with it. Belief, faith, comes from trusting in God's control versus trying to maintain our own.

Jesus' life was not one without difficulty and uncertainty. In Jesus' life, there were moments when everything looked chaotic. On his journey to the cross, the disciples beside themselves, they'd all done a runner and left him.

Looked like utter chaos. But Jesus had faith. Trusted his Father. That gave him the ability to walk towards the cross. You know the same faith that Jesus had on his journey to Calvary?

The same faith. His righteous, firm, unshakable faith. That same faith that Jesus has is the faith that he gives you in Christ. He imputes, he swaps it with your unrighteous lack of faith.

[29 : 50] Jesus' faith. That's a big faith. That faith is what he gives to you as a gift to trust him when you don't know what tomorrow will bring.

Jesus' faith on the way to the cross is the same faith that's available for you to trust in what he has for you tomorrow. Is God's plan for your life a mystery?

Yeah, it is. But it's a good one. Is your destination a mystery? No, it's not. Because the gospel is no longer a mystery. Because he's paid for your sin.

He's secured your future. Which means you can live trusting him for tomorrow. Let's pray. Almighty God, we struggle so much with unknown uncertainties.

We ask what if questions about things that we have no control over. And we over plan and try to mitigate the future and complications.

[31 : 03] And then things happen and they wreck our plans. Things that we never expected. We live in fear of what might happen.

Or sometimes we just run from it. We don't want to think about it. So we put our heads in the sand and think it'll all just blow over if we don't deal with it. Lord, I thank you.

And it's hard for us to understand some why the difficulties and the things that we go through. But I thank you that you are the master chef. That we can taste and see that you are good.

And I pray that you would give us a big vision of our eternal security in Jesus. And I pray as we think on that, that we wouldn't fear tomorrow.

Because our eternal future is secure in you. I thank you that our destination is not a mystery. And even though tomorrow is, I thank you and I pray that you'd give us the faith.

[32 : 06] That whatever happens, regardless, you are holding us through it. I ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen.