

# Protecting His Name

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[ 0 : 00 ] Before we jump into the passage, I just want us to remind ourselves of where we're at in this series of Isaiah 40-55. Just a reminder, last week we were in Isaiah 47.

! It was kind of a difficult chapter last week. There was a lot of judgment. It was always looking at this evil in this nation called Babylon, who were oppressing God's people for 70 years without any grace or mercy.

They were just cruel for the whole time and it resulted in their judgment. That's where we were last week. Now, whenever someone is put down, and maybe this is true for you, or maybe it's true for most of us, whenever someone's put down, there is the temptation, isn't there, for the ones who are not to kind of feel a bit superior, proud.

Maybe looking down as well, look down on them. Look down on the oppressor, because they've been judged. And I think that's what we find today in Isaiah 48.

It's what we find with Israel, that Babylon's judgment, I think, perhaps makes Israel feel that they're a cut above. Looking down on evil, sinful Babylon.

[ 1 : 24 ] The message we have today is a corrective for them. It's why Israel need to listen. Listen. And you'll see that word listen comes out throughout as we're going to read it together.

Now, the word for listen or hear in Hebrew is the word shema. And it means more than just hearing sounds. It means listening to us understand and to obey.

To take on board what the living God is saying, really listening and understanding and obeying. This is a shema, a hear, a listen message.

But it's also a shema, a hear message to us. Because what we see in Israel, I think we see in places we see in the church today.

What Israel need to know is what it means not to just be God's people by name only, which is where they take, you know, we're God's people.

[ 2 : 29 ] Not to just be God's people in name only, but to be God's people by their deeds as well. How they lived. That is true for the church, that we can't just be, or the church can't just be, the church in name only.

But the church, and we need to know what it means to live as the church. I think that's the opportunity for us today. It is to rethink and reconsider what it sometimes means to move from being the church, not only in our heads, but to be the church in our heart and our hands in the world.

With that in mind, let us shema. Let us hear and listen to God's message to his people. Isaiah 48. This is God's word. Listen to this.

Then suddenly I acted and they came to pass. For I knew how stubborn you were. Your neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze. Therefore I told you these things long ago. Before they happened I announced them to you. So that you could not say, My images brought them about. My wooden image and metal god ordained them.

[ 4 : 12 ] You have heard these things. Look at them all. Will you not admit them? From now on I will tell you of new things. Of hidden things unknown to you. They are created now and not long ago.

You have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, Yes, I knew of them. You have neither heard nor understood. From of old your ears have not been open.

Well do I know how treacherous you are. You were called a rebel from birth. For my own namesake I delay my wrath. For the sake of my praise I hold it back from you so as not to destroy you completely.

See, I have refined you. Though not as silver, I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake I do this.

How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another. This is God's word.  
[ 5 : 16 ] God, the living God, will always protect his glory. He will always protect his glory. Which is kind of the principle idea that comes through this passage.

If that is the idea, the question that we must ask is, If we're talking about God protecting his glory, what is his glory? Well, it's kind of too vast to explain in a nutshell.

Because his glory is all that he is. It is his radiant brilliance. It is the visible weight of all that he is. His love is a glorious love.

His holiness is a glorious holiness. His power is a glorious power. Everything that God is, that he deserves to be praised for and receive fame and acclamation.

That is his glory, to receive fame for his name. God's desire is always to protect that. To protect his glory. To protect the fame and worthiness of his name, of who he is.

[ 6 : 24 ] In Isaiah 48, in these first 11 verses, we see three kind of attributes, part of his character.

Maybe you might call them his perfections. That display who he is. That displays glory, his character. Three traits that he wants to protect. Protecting his glory.

We see him wanting to protect his power, his knowledge and his name. Power, knowledge and name. You look with me in verse 5.

He's saying he's going to protect his power. Therefore, he's talking to Israel about things that he's let them know. I told you these things long ago.

Before they happened, I announced them to you. Why does he do that? So that you could not say, My images brought them about. Kind of self-glory.

[ 7 : 20 ] The idols, the things that I do, the things that I worship, they brought them about. He's protecting his power. God announces things beforehand, way ahead of time of them happening, so that he's the only one that can be held responsible for his works.

No other power did this. And by announcing them way beforehand, he's the only one who could be held responsible, that his glory shown in power cannot be ascribed, given to another.

He protects his power. Or how people think of who did it. The second one is that he protects the idea of him being all-knowing, his knowledge.

He kind of changes tack. Instead of announcing things beforehand, look what he does. Verse 6.

See, halfway down. He says, He doesn't announce new things.

He's doing so that no one can say, I already knew this was going to happen. We've seen earlier what this is referring to. God saves his people out of Babylon using Cyrus, this foreign king.

[ 8 : 56 ] Nobody would predict that was going to happen. It's a new thing. He didn't tell them long, long, long ago before that. He told them, this is new, so that you couldn't say, I knew that was going to happen.

God protects his glory in protecting that he is the all-knowing God. And then we see in verse 9, he aims to protect his name.

Verse 9. For my own name's sake, I delay my wrath. For the sake of my praise, I hold it back for you, so as not to destroy you completely. He's not going to destroy his people, but he delays his anger.

He delays his wrath. You see, it comes back to the covenant promises that he's made to his people. He promised that he would redeem a people for himself, and if he goes back on those promises, he would be a liar.

He keeps his promises, because that is the only way that he can protect his name. In Exodus 34, the Lord announces his name. He says, it's quite a long explanation of his name.

[ 10 : 09 ] This is what he says about himself. He says, this is who he is. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. If God destroys them completely, if he destroys them totally, completely, if he wipes them out, everything he said about who he is in the past would be a lie.

He protects his name by remaining faithful. And so, anything, or anyone, that attempts to steal God's glory from him, comes up with a God who is relentless in protecting his glory.

He's relentless in protecting the attributes of who he is, that no one can say they're more powerful than God, that no one can say they're more knowing than God, and that no one can say, can take

his name away from him.

That's kind of normal, isn't it, that we protect things that belong to us. It's kind of normal in some ways that you expect God to do that. Even just in our own way of life.

[ 11 : 31 ] You think of the layers of protection we use to make sure we don't get burgled. Locks on our doors, alarms, cameras, maybe even a safe. We use that level of protection, don't we?

Because the threat is often real, but whether it's going to happen is unforeseen. That's why we use protection. We think that we perceive the real threat, but whether it's going to happen or not is unforeseen.

God is relentless in protecting his name. Because the threat is real to him too. It's present, but it's foreseen.

The threat is people wanting to steal his glory from him. Wanting to claim that they've got his power. Wanting to claim that they have his knowledge.

And wanting to claim that they're his people without living like he tells them to. Israel. It's kind of where we, from here, move to our second point.

[ 12 : 34 ] If you're a person who likes to take notes, this would be our second point. Israel attempt to steal God's glory rather than protect it. Israel attempt to steal God's glory rather than protect it.

The problem, I mean, the bottom line problem of all of this is often that it comes to pride. God. Because it's pride, isn't it, that leads Israel to position themselves higher than the living God. You might remember then. There's kind of a natural righteous order of how the world is supposed to be set up. You've got God at the top of the pyramid, humanity second, and then the whole of creation comes third.

God gives dominion to people to look after the world underneath. Right at the beginning of when we started this series, it's back in chapter 40.

The reason the exile happens is because that's how they lived in Israel. They put themselves on the top of the pyramid and put God at the bottom.

[ 13 : 39 ] Position themselves higher than the living God. Well, here, the same thing happens. They've been in, it's quite astounding really, they've been in exile for 70 years.

This is what God is saying to them. You're going to be in exile for 70 years. And at the end of that, you're going to try to position yourself higher than me, just like you did before you went into exile for the reason you were kicked out.

Look at me, what he says they're going to be like. Verse four. I knew how stubborn you were. 70 years and you're exactly the same.

I know how stubborn you were. Your neck muscles were iron. Your forehead was bronze. It's stubbornness pictured with a body that has no flexibility, unable to change its position.

Neck that can't move. You know, it's just, it's neck muscles, it's iron. A forehead that can't change its expression. They're unable, this is what he's saying, they're unable to change themselves.

[ 14 : 44 ] 70 years and the nation, in many ways, will be exactly the same. They want God's power for themselves. When God does something, they want a piece of the glory pie.

That's exactly what they would do, given half the chance. Verse five. That's what they would, if God did it, that's what they would say. We brought this about. We worshipped idols, and that's what ordained everything.

They want to know everything God does. Verse seven. They would say, we knew this. We knew this was going to happen. They've seen that in their past, there's false prophets that claimed what was going to happen, and it was all a bunch of lies.

They want God's name, but without his presence. That's what they say. You know, what we see in the first couple of verses, we belong to the holy city. We know God. We're a glorious people.

We deserve to be saved. The church, we, and, the church at large, we need to hear this message.

[ 15 : 50 ] Now, this, this passage is directed at a nation, and whilst it might be true of us as individuals, we might be able to see where we've done that, that's not where we're going to go with it today, because if it's directed at a nation, the new nation, the new people of God is the church, his kingdom, and so that's kind of where we need to apply and think of that.

It's the church, like Israel, want God's glory for itself. And we know that we can do that. When things go well in church, it is easy for us to want to take credit.

Look what we did. Look what we did. Aren't we amazing? Now, we want, we want, when people come to faith, when people turn to Jesus, it is easy to think that instead of thinking that it is the living

God that did it, think it's a technique, maybe.

A style of preaching, giftings within the church that are responsible. Look what we did. We must be doing something right because people are turning to Jesus.

We must be doing something right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Look what we did. If we just replicate this, that's where the success comes from.

[ 17 : 14 ] We can see sometimes we want to know everything. People want to come across, don't they? Like they've got their kind of special knowledge, understanding that no one else does.

We've got ministers end up with, you know, sort of theological, intellectual pride. It's a real thing. And then you've got kind of spiritual pride.

Some think they hear things from God that no one else hears. I just, if you, this is, if you ever hear this in a church, if someone starts and they're preaching, if they start with, well, I believe what God is saying.

I just, when I hear that and this is, I just think, well, you know, not interested in what you believe God is saying. I want to know what he's actually saying. Trying to work out what will happen if the church takes a certain course of action, second guessing God and looking back and trying to, sort of, what was God doing here and there?

Maybe he's doing this. I'm definitely sure that God's doing this. We see that. And finally, we want his name. We want to be his in a name only.

[ 18 : 23 ] We want to belong to God without being, it's easy to, you know, sometimes, desiring to belong to God is a great thing. It's harder to become more like Jesus.

Belonging to God is easier than the challenge to be like him. Under the waterline, what's going on in our hearts in the church at large is the desire to be like God.

It's as old as it comes, isn't it? It's as old, you got, it's all the way back to the garden. The desire to be like God. We want to be like God, we want his glory, we want to depend on ourselves for salvation, wisdom, and direction.

The church wants to depend on itself and what's really going on is because that's something that we can control. It is easier to pull the wool over people's eyes than even if our own, if we're in control of what's going on.

And how does Israel cover it up? Well, they cover it up with speech, don't they? They sound like they're the real deal. So we see in the first two verses, what do they, you know, they say, we're citizens of heaven.

[ 19 : 35 ] We're citizens of the Holy City. Look at what God has done through us. Look at what we know. Look at the name we have amongst all the other people. Look at the name we have amongst all the other churches.

God's people attempt to steal his glory, to steal his glorious power, to steal his glorious knowledge, and to steal his glorious name for themselves to boost their name.

We need a different type of thief.

Strange line. The good news is we need a different type of thief. You see, we need a thief who will come when we're least expecting it.

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ comes as the unexpected thief. Not to steal glory, but he comes to embezzle the debt of our sin onto his own soul.

[ 20 : 54 ] You see, he breaks in, but he breaks into our hearts. He breaks in. We didn't want him to. We did not want Jesus to come into our lives.

He had to break into our hearts as an unexpected thief. But he breaks in. But instead of taking what's valuable, he takes away the rubbish.

You see, that's not normally how a thief operates, isn't it? Imagine coming home, you find, oh man, the burglar alarm's going off, doors wide open, windows are smashed. Oh man, what's going on, you're tearing your hair out, you come in and oh, what's gone, what's missing?

The thief, he's taken out the rubbish. You see, he can come again. Well, maybe not the smashed windows, but he can come again. Does a tidy up, does some covering, takes out the rubbish.

Jesus breaks in and he takes out the rubbish. We don't think it's rubbish because it's our desires that we, it's our sinful desires that we think are great, but he takes the rubbish out of our hearts.

[ 22 : 07 ] He takes all the attempts that we've made to steal God's glory to himself. He takes, and he takes it so that he can perfectly protect his father's glory.

This is, this is right at the center of how the living God protects his own name, how he can maintain the covenant promise.

You see, remember the God, the naming of himself, how he can keep that name, that he's a God that forgives. I mean, how do we hold those two together?

In God's name, when he says he's the compassionate God who forgives sin, but he's also the God who punishes sin. That's the covenant promise. Both of those things are true.

It can only be via substitution. It can only be via substitution. And you see, it's right in this passage. Look what God says in verse 9. He says, for his own name's sake, I'll delay my wrath.

[ 23 : 11 ] For his praise, he will hold his wrath back. For the sake of my praise, I'll hold it back from you. I won't destroy you completely. The God of the Bible maintains and sustains his name by delaying his wrath until his son receives it.

His praise is maintained by holding the wrath back until Jesus is hanging on wood. And his body is destroyed in what is the most glory-filled act of history.

glory. We don't have to steal God's glory. This is the amazing thing. We want this glory all the time, God's glory, for ourselves.

We don't have to steal it. Do you know why? Because when we turn to Jesus, he gives us it freely. The church, we, the body of Christ, receive the glory we've always wanted, free of charge, given to us, because he then makes us glorious like himself.

You, right now, we, the church, right now, as a child of God, you display the glory of God. You've wanted it, your whole, you've wanted to swap, you've wanted it and get it by stealing it, but in the gospel, you're given it, freely of charge, you're made glorious in his sight.

[ 24 : 40 ] The church is the manifold wisdom of God and displays the glory of God to the whole world. The glory you want is given free of charge through the gospel. What does that mean for how we live?

Well, now, like Jesus, we can protect God's glory. And instead of trying to steal it in pride, we protect it with humility.

The old desire to be like God was built out of a desire to control our future, because we could control what we were doing. If we had the power and the knowledge and the name of God, what could stop us?

But this gift of glory, never something we could attain ourselves, but could be received, achieved by humility, by going to the cross. That is why Jesus is exalted and lifted high.

It's why Jesus is lifted high is because he humbles himself to death on a cross. And it's because of that that you're given the glory through him as you follow that pattern of, as we follow that pattern of life.

[ 25 : 56 ] if we already are glorious in the eyes of our saviour, which we are, you see, that changes everything. Because that desire for God's power is reshaped.

Instead of taking credit or trying to take credit for what God has done, instead of saying, look at us, instead of thinking your technique or gifting or something about you is what we want to push our own selves up, we're just able to praise and give thanks for what God does.

In us, but in every church. We don't need to try, push ourselves to be better than another church or compare to another church. We know that we are instruments in the hands of the Redeemer.

And so is churches throughout Scotland. We can pray and give thanks when other churches grow. If they have better music or better things than we do, praise God for those churches.

The desire for power is transformed. The desire to be all-knowing is transformed. We don't need to know everything. We can rest in God's plan for the church and for our own lives.

[ 27 : 13 ] He knows what he's doing even when we don't. We don't have to work everything out.

We don't have to put our own spin on things. We don't have to make out that we know, you know, have a sort of a direct line of communication to the living God that no one else has.

Because we have the complete and finished word. God speaks through his word with authority with what he wants us to know. And finally, we don't need to earn his name or try to get to the holy city.

Ourselves. That is your home. We are citizens of heaven. And we don't just own the heavenly passport, but with joy we live as people who belong there, fully dependent on him.

We're not the church in name only, but by the power of the spirit we can look and live like the church. Indeed. Obeying Jesus by the power of the spirit.

The church is one body. We're one body. There are big churches that attract thousands. There are small churches like ours, but together we are one with one head. And so we don't need to be jealous or fight for position or prestige or power or knowledge or name, but give thanks for what God is doing in us and throughout the world.

[ 28 : 40 ] Jesus comes like an unexpected thief to steal our sin. And when he steals it, he is prosecuted as if he did those spiritual crimes himself.

The most glory filled act of history and gives you citizenship and a name that will last forever. In humility, empowered by the spirit of God because of the unexpected thief, we can live like him, full of thanks, full of praise and full of rest.

Let's pray. Almighty God, we're so thankful to you.

We know that there is such a temptation to repeat that sin that is the oldest sin to want to be like you.

In the garden, just repeating it. We see it repeated through Israel throughout the ages and we've seen it repeated through the church throughout the ages and even in our own hearts there is a temptation to want to be powerful like you, to want to know everything you do and to want your name without you.

[ 30 : 05 ] We're sorry. We repent, we turn to you but we thank you that you are this unexpected thief, the one that comes and breaks into our hearts and takes all our sin so that we are given the glory.

We're made glorious like you and we display the glory of God in our lives. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to live lives that glorify you, to live as the people that we actually are.

We are glorious. Help us to live in a glorious way. And so we pray and ask for your blessing in Jesus' name. Amen.