



UNDERSTANDING GOD PART 4: The God of Judgment and Glory

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For those of you who are counting, it is 34 days until the college football season kicks off, and 46 days until the start of the NFL season. For me, and I'm sure for many more of you in here, these are more than events, but they are opportunities for something. Perhaps the joy of a Saturday afternoon at a Griz game, or the peace of knowing your team won on Sunday, or for others maybe even hope that what your club did during the offseason will manifest itself into a title run.

I realize that for me football season makes clear two aspects of hope I have in my life. I have a hope of structure and a hope of substance. Structurally, I look to the Tennessee Titans. Though I do not own them, coach them, or have any real control over them, I put my faith in their ability to run a team well, to execute a game plan, and to outscore the opponents. However when we place our hope in structures outside of ourselves we often know how quickly these can become damaged.

Players can get hurt, or suspended. As the Penn State football program showed a few years ago, beloved coaches and organizations can become defiled by sinful allegations and actions of wicked men. In politics, or social movements, our leaders can become scandalized, disqualified, impeached due to flaws or errors.

Because we know that structures can become damaged we like to hedge our bets by insulating ourselves with hopes of substance. Things which we can lay hold of, control, and rely on personally. For me during football season, this is the DVR. I can medicate my anxiety by fast-forwarding the failures, and I can revel in my success by rewinding and replaying the victories. Even if the Titans go winless, I can rely on the food that accompanies my Sunday traditions to bring me a sort of satisfaction.

In other areas of our life we seek to enjoy these substances which insulate us and comfort us. Perhaps it's a well-stocked closet, or luxury car. Maybe it is Netflix, a good book and a nice nap. But in the same way our structures are often impeachable in terms of their quality, so too are our hopes of substance fragile in that they are quickly taken away from us.

My budget can revoke my access to NFL Sunday Ticket. Your schedule can keep you away from the stadium. A fire can destroy the closet and the garage, and disease can even eliminate the joy of family, friends, and children.

Our hopes are fragile because we as humans are fragile. The book of Isaiah is going to highlight in different ways the transient nature of our hopes be it in something outside of us, or something near and seemingly under our own control. In this book God is speaking through the prophet Isaiah to a people who have placed too much hope in things which are not God. The nation of Israel, and specifically the Tribe of Judah has hoped in leadership and luxuries instead of the God who is over all things. In chapters 3 and 4 of Isaiah God wants to begin the process of warning his people of the subtle dangers of ultimate hope in less than ultimate things. Even things which in and of themselves are good.

What we are going to see today is that: **God's glory is unimpeachable, irrevocable, and unmistakable.** God's glory is not subject to corruption like our own leaders, his glory is not in danger of destruction or removal like our trinkets and pleasures, and there will be a day where all will see with great clarity the stunning glory of God.

Now before we go on I want to briefly touch on what I mean when I say the glory of God. Glory is a big theme in scripture. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, the apostle Paul says that the biggest problem in all humanity is not seeing "the gospel of the glory of Christ." He says something similar in 1 Timothy 1:11 when he says that the message which he has been given is "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God."

But what is glory? The dictionary definition is high renown, honor or radiance. But still those words are hard to understand without context. What I think is helpful is to look at the word glory in these two senses: innate glory and experienced glory. There is innate glory in things which are naturally marvelous. This innate glory is glorious whether people respond to it or not. Just because I cannot understand the science and physics behind our solar system doesn't mean it's not amazing. The fault is with my small brain, not the object. It would be foolish to conclude that simply because it is cold on a clear winters afternoon that the sun is not hot. In the same way, the God of the Bible is glorious in that he is the author of all creation, the object of all glory, holy, pure, just and righteous. He doesn't need our affirmation to be glorious he simply is.

What Isaiah is going to try to do in this text is to take this innate glory of God, and work it into an experienced glory of God. We experience glory deep in our souls when we encounter something which overwhelms us. The danger is that we are often overwhelmed or made emotive at things which are not innately worthy of such adoration. It is cute when my two year old daughter marvels at the power of a band-aide to heal her wounds, but it would be an insufficient amazement for her to stay at band-aide level medicine her whole life. While we all experience glory in different things, God wants to fight for an ultimate experience of his innate glory in all things. This doesn't mean that we won't experience anything other than God, but it is our experience of God which makes sense of all other hopes, comforts, and desires.

So we want to look at God's glory today through this type of understanding, but before we get to the glory of God in Isaiah 3 and 4 we start with the judgment of God against his people. **The Day of Judgment.** Last week Isaiah introduced us to this idea of the "Day of the Lord" and he is going to continue to develop this narrative in our text today. God is going to warn Judah of the judgment which is coming on behalf of their sin: **Isaiah 3:1-8.**

So here we read a real warning of what is going to come upon Judah. God says he is going to remove all support and supply. In 586 Babylon is coming to Judah and Jerusalem, in this event might and comfort will flee. There are two things I want us to know about God's coming judgment towards the people of Israel. The first is that it is coming by God himself. Look back at **Isaiah 3:1.**

These are God's people, his covenant ones, and yet it is by the hand of God that they will be afflicted. God's love includes the hardships and trials of our life. These moments are not arbitrary or pointless, but they are God ordained and for the good of God's people. In reflecting on a later captivity, God says that he is going to bring judgment, **"For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen" (Is. 45:4).**

How is it that a good God can promise to bring such a disaster for the good of his people? Because while these coming events are an act of judgment, they are really only a foreshadow of it. For the people of Israel a real day of judgment was coming. In 701 they would be threatened by Assyria, in 586 they would be carried away by Babylon. But this judgment would not be ultimate, not all the wicked would be destroyed, their unjust captors would go unpunished, and even some of the righteous would be slain. This historical execution of judgment is an example of how suffering in this life prepares us for the ultimate Day of Judgment. The day when there are no second chances, and no preparatory lessons.

Each and every one of us will face something more terrible than Babylon. It can happen in an instant: a drunk drive, a mutated cancer cell, a tremor in a surgeons hand. And in the same way God is graciously preparing Judah's heart for judgment, so too will the historical enactment of Judah's historical judgment prepare us for ultimate judgment before God himself. By noting Jerusalem's hope in judgment we can begin to challenge and shape our own hope in suffering, and trial before our final judgment.

So the first thing we want to know about the Day of Judgment is that it is God's Day of Judgment. But we also want to understand why it is that God is bringing this judgment. This is a severe punishment which God is planning. What has warranted such a strong action? Look with me at **Isaiah 3:8-9.**

At the heart of the national sin of Israel is a defiance against God's glory. This is the second truth about this coming judgment: it comes because God's glory is ignored. His eyes are on his people, he sees them, he knows

them, he seeks to dwell with them, but his people brazenly reject and refuse to grant him any adoration or honor. Before sin is ever behavioral it is relational. The moment you are born you may not have acted sinfully, but your inability to see the glory of God properly condemns you relationally. Sin is not a taboo behavior, it the state of a heart blinded to God's innate glory, unable to experience his salvation. Sinful actions are signs of our brokenness not the source of it.

When the innate glory of God is rejected, judgment ensues. Because judgment is coming, we as humans are hardwired to find hope in something. We might not admit judgment in the biblical sense, but it is this feeling which drives us to make certain specific hopes in life. In this sense any trial we experience is God's kindness to reveal to us any false hopes which in the end would fail to save us. This is God's kindness to us. John Calvin calls trial "salvation concealed in hope." Suffering comes when objects we turn to for salvation, comfort, glory, are hidden from our view. In those moments, what is it that we will find true hope in?

We are going to strive to answer that question by looking at the three hopes of the people of Israel in Isaiah 3-4. **Three Experiences of Judgment.**

The first experience of judgment we are going to look at is the experience of the men and rulers of Israel. As we read in verses 1-5 we see God's systematic removal of leadership: no soldiers, no counselors, no pagan magicians, no prophets, no real leaders. After all these things are revoked and oppression is running rampant we see the men attempt to find their hope in **Isaiah 3:6-7**.

In the experience of these men we see the false hope of structures to act as stability in times of hardship. In this specific instance it is in the desire for a political savior, someone to heal them from what is desperately broken. But in that day, no one will rise to the challenge. For the odds of resisting the Assyrian threat or the Babylonian forces would be insurmountable. The cost of leading a revolution would be too great. So no one leads, but even if someone did, we know that our structures cannot fully solve our problem. We know this because Isaiah references the leaders that they do have: **Isaiah 3:11-15**.

Politics are important, and God has put them in place under his sovereign hand, and while we should be engaged in political means to ensure the greatest good we should never assume that politics or politicians themselves are the greatest good. Politics bring structure, stability and leadership, but humans at the helm of these things are never able to make them perfect. Our structures, as mentioned before are fragile, corruptible, and morally impeachable.

In the face of unrest and affliction these men looked to a structure to be their deliverance, but they were disappointed. It's typically assumed that politics is not the be-all-end all for our security. But how much of your hope is veiled in the structure and leadership of your career, where as long as the company does well, you will get paid and be satisfied? What about the structure of your relationships: So long as my marriage stays intact, I will be safe? So long as my plan for school goes flawlessly, I will make it. To rely on structure for hope is foolish because the structures and their people are corruptible. The cry of those who trust in the structures of man is the cry: Someone save us! But in the last days no mere human will be able to save you.

If the cry of the men is someone save us, the cry of the women in this text is "Someone comfort us!" Whereas the men turned to structures, the women turned to their personal substances, their riches, their desirability and their affluence. Look with me at **Isaiah 3:16-4:1**.

Isaiah is predicting that in this Day of Judgment many of the men will be captured or killed and the women will then look for salvation in their acceptance by someone else. And in order to be seen as acceptable, or as valuable, they rely on their external adornment. Isaiah says they look with seductive eyes at other men, they jangle their jewelry in hopes that their monetary comforts would bring them the salvation they sought. "We look desirable!" they would say, "Look at what we have!"

But God is going to afflict their beauty. He is going to scab their forehead, he is going to make them undesirable.

He is going to remove from them the benefit of their appearance and all the adornment which they relied on so as to show how undesirable they really are. God is going to make it very clear that nothing which they have will actually bring them comfort.

In the Western world this is always a festering problem in our opulent hearts. We insulate ourselves with things: money, sex, toys, friends, family. And as long as these things remain with us we feel content, but damage these, threaten these, and we show our vulnerability. I realized this in May when we thought my wife was miscarrying. We had miscarried in December, and she had shown all the signs of it happening again. So as we sat in the waiting room of an ER in California my mind raced to my things: we have insurance, we have our deductible saved up, I can pay for this and we will be saved. But in beautiful conviction we found out the baby was still alive, and that no amount of money could buy its salvation.

This was always the case. It was always God's baby, and still is God's baby, but I was so quick to turn to monetary value instead of God-ward reliance. But it was God's goodness to me to afflict Sarah and I in this way. Because in his mercy he showed us our folly. Charles Spurgeon says it well, **Praise God that you have not been left to the darkness and ignorance which continued prosperity might have involved, but that in the great fight of affliction, you have been made competent for the outshin ings of his glory in his wonderful dealings with you.**

God is bringing this judgment on the men and this judgment on the women so that they might realize how fickle their hopes are and turn back to the glory of God as the experience of hope in times of trial. The same is true in your life, and the objects you turn to as ultimate in moments of suffering are often the objects we worship as ultimate in our hearts.

So let us look at our third experience this morning: The righteous. Right in the middle of Isaiah's warning to the men and admonishment of the wicked is one verse. Eighteen words of hope amidst a chapter of destruction. Look with me at **Isaiah 3:10**.

The men hoped in structure, but the fruit of their labor was destruction since their structure was corrupt. The women hoped in comfort and substance, but the fruit of their lust brought shame because their comforts were easily removed. But the righteous: it will be well with them. How? When judgment comes how do we know it will be well for us? When suffering comes how can we be among those who are act righteously?

This is where we must understand the importance of God's glory. Because there are two sides to the day of the Lord. On one hand it is the Day of Judgment, but on the other hand it is the **Day of Glory**. Look with me at **Isaiah 4:2-6**. In that day, in that same Day of Judgment and sorrow, God's branch will be seen as beautiful and glorious.

This glory is the hope of the Righteous. Look with me again at **Is. 4:2-4**. Some hope in structure, some in substance, but the righteous will lean into the Day of Judgment with a hope in God's glorious salvation. In the historical sense it is God's faithful people who will endure the coming military triumphs which will show the beautiful remnant of God's glory. But in the full sense of this passage we look forward to the Day of Judgment and Glory yet to come where God's people are made beautiful, eternal and untouchable by the true branch. **Jeremiah 23:5-6**. Salvation is through the branch and its glory is the fruit of righteousness. We cannot help but look at Jesus' own words in **John 15:4-5**.

What is it that makes the righteous righteous? What is it that gives the righteous hope in the middle of present trial and coming judgment? Isaiah says to the righteous, keep producing that fruit. But what is that fruit: the fruit of the land is survivors made holy in salvation. If you wish to have hope amidst all this world throws at you, have faith in the Jesus who saves us. The Jesus who is willing to lead a broken humanity, and zealous for even the most unattractive of heart.

But do not assume this faith, or this hope will be easy. In one sense I see this hope. It's in front of my eyes, it's right there! But between my eyes and this page is an indefinite time of life and suffering. There are times where

despite my efforts I can't see this hope. There are events where life screams so loud, and I can feel the boots of invading armies. But this is where we must dig our foxholes in the hope of this passage.

Look at the future promise Isaiah gives us in describing that still to come Day of the Lord: **Isaiah 4:5-6**. There will come a day when those who are saved by Jesus' sacrifice through faith will pass through the barrier of final judgment. And in that day the only structure we see is the blazing pillar of fire and cloud by day and by night. The greatest comfort is the canopy of glory which is threatened by no storm and veiled by no darkness. There will be a day where never again will hope be concealed for a single moment.

In the shadow of suffering we are afforded the opportunity to shed light on our future hope. A hope of a life where all we will see is salvation made manifest. Today we cannot not see danger, but one day we cannot not see and experience glory.

How do we bridge this time-frame? Here is our application **1 John 3:2-3**. Let us together hope in this salvation and so be made pure and righteous. Let us see feel the pain of momentary trial so that we can turn to the Jesus who removes the pain of ultimate judgment. And let us yearn with beautiful anticipation for the day when as the old hymn says, "the day when my faith shall be made sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll; the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul."