

Sermon Transcript from April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
Understanding Judgment  
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Text here Isaiah 52. If you've been reading along with us, we've been in The Year of Biblical Literacy and right now we are in the Prophets and Isaiah. And this comes at time – we're going to read Isaiah 52, and this is a word from Isaiah while Israel is just at their low point. Okay? They've been ransacked, they've been exiled and God has this word for them. Alright? So, let's read this together.

Isaiah 52: "Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength!

"Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city.

"The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.

"Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, Jerusalem.

"Free yourself from the chains on your neck, Daughter Zion, now a captive.

"For this is what the Lord says:

"You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed."

"For this is what the Sovereign Lord says:

"At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them.

"And now what do I have here?' declares the Lord.

"For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,' declares the Lord.

"All day long my name is constantly blasphemed.

"Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I."

Check this out:

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

"Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy.

"When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

"Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

"The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

"Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing!

"Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the Lord's house.

"But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

"See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised up and lifted up and highly exalted.

"Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured

beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond any likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

"For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand."

This is God's Word. Let's pray.

Lord, I thank You for that word of hope and I pray that it would resonate tonight as we dig deeper into this attempt in our capacity, Lord, to understand who You are. And we come here humbly, Lord. I come here humbly and say very easily, God, I just open up my hands to You and say, "Who am I to try to explain to my brothers and sisters who You are?"

God, would Your Spirit do it tonight? Would You use the words of my mouth and, in the words of Your Living Word, Lord God, would it minister to Your people tonight? I pray that eyes would open, that ears would hear, that hearts would become soft, Lord, to receive what You have for us tonight. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, as I said, we've been in this journey through 2016 together. We've called it The Year of Biblical Literacy. And it is with a hope that we would begin to know and understand the Bible as we read the Bible throughout together. If you're new to this, you can jump in now. We're in the Prophets. It's a great time to get into the Word. We're currently in a short series. We've been doing these short series' throughout the year. And we're in this short series called "The God I Don't Understand," and I hope you appreciate how hard it is to do a series like this. I've never been at a church that has tried to tackle "The God I Don't Understand."

We did this because we did a survey. We asked you guys, as you were reading through the Old Testament, "What are some of the challenging things that you're experiencing? What's some of the stuff you're wrestling with?"

Right? And the number one response was trying to understand the Law, which Lomas taught on a few weeks ago. The second most troubling thing you were wrestling with was understanding violence in the Old Testament. And then, the third thing was understanding the character of God, particularly His judgment. And, by far of the three, understanding God's character and His judgment is the hardest, and that's why Lomas isn't here. Alright? Lomas went on vacation when it all got tough.

And I think there's some real parts of us, each of us, that when we hear about judgment and you come to a church and you hear that word "judgment" and try to unpack "what is God's judgment," there's this dissonant thing inside of us, this conflict that we feel. And rightly so. I think that there's a modern perception of God in our society and in the church that holds just a few predominant principles.

One is that God is angry. God just seems to be pissed all the time when you read through the Old Testament. There's just this anger that rises up and you see it and He doesn't seem to want to be around His people very much. I think that's a dominant perception of God in our culture and in our church. The second is that we are these filthy sinners that God can't stand until Jesus comes, and Jesus is like a soap that makes us just tolerable to be around for God.

I think that's a perception in the church and in our society. And then the third is that the role of the church is to keep us in check; to be our sin management system so that one day, hopefully, if we do this right enough, we will all get into heaven and we can stop trying. It'll just be done. We'll have arrived. I think that represents the perception of God in the church and in society in many ways. Especially when you talk about God's judgment. This represents, you guys, a historical shift. It wasn't always this way. This started early in the Catholic church and then it moved right into the reformation and then it got really strong roots here in America with the Quakers and the Puritans. This is a tradition that's been passed down to us.

But, it wasn't always this way. People didn't see God this way, and I hope tonight as we try to understand God's judgment, His character and His judgment, I hope that we can recalibrate a little bit of the way we think of those things about God's character and His judgment, predominately when we look at the Old Testament.

The first thing I hope shifts is that we will begin to see that God cares for both the individual and the people group. See, we tend to make this about us and God, that God

is just so infatuated with your foul-ups every single day. He's just watching, maniacally, for all the ways you're going to screw up, that this is like His pleasure thing. And I just want to shatter that idea. One, that that is all God cares about and two, that you're the only thing that God cares about.

Okay, He does. He loves you. But, you're not the only thing that He cares about. That's a very Western – especially American – way of looking at who God is in this individual way. God cares for the individual, but He cares for the people group.

There is both a micro-story that God is working throughout Scripture and in our time that has to do with the individual lives of people. But also, there's a macro-story going on that God cares for and fights for and loves entire people groups and all tribes and tongues and nations. This means that God judges and cares about both your life, but also the human story; the macro picture.

The second shift that I hope we can tackle a little bit tonight is that God's judgment is good news, not bad news. That this actually – what you're going to hear today – might be the best thing you've heard all day, maybe the best thing all week, hopefully the best thing you've heard in your entire life. That God is a good judge and that we need a good judge. I'm going to contend for that tonight. God's judgment is good news, not bad news.

Now I think, no matter where you come from, no matter what your background is, no matter what you came into tonight thinking about church or God or Christ or anything else, I think we could all agree that we live in a mess of a world. Right? I could talk about ISIS, I could talk about Boko Haram, I could talk about mass incarceration, I could talk about inequality of income. I could talk about any one of those things for the entire night and you guys, I think, would agree. Like, "Oh, yeah. I understand. We're in a mess."

Right? Are you guys with me? Okay. Five of you are with me. Thank you. This is good. But, maybe dial it down, okay? I'll get off my soapbox a little bit and dial it down.

We experience injustice on this huge level throughout the world, but we experience it in our daily lives all the time. In my former life, before I was a pastor, I coached high school baseball. And this one year, 2009, I was coaching a team that was in the league championship, and this was the final game of the regular season going into the playoffs. We were playing for the league championship. And I've got the guys out in the outfield and we're getting warmed up and we're getting ready and guys are psyched and everything. And I see this kid walk out dressed as an umpire and I think, "What's going on here?"

So, I go to meet him and I'm like, "Hey, what's up, buddy? What's going on?"

And he's like, "Hey, you know, we were really busy scheduled with umpires today. Pretty short handed. So, I got assigned to your game today. I've only been doing this a couple weeks and I know I'm supposed to have a second umpire at second base, but I'm all by myself today. So, here I am."

And I was like, "Fantastic. That's great. Welcome. Let's get the game started."

So, we get going and this is a close game. Right? Close game. Two good teams. And we're in about the fifth or sixth inning when our opponent does something and makes this terrible mistake. If you know baseball at all, you have to bat in a particular line-up, right? Each team is given each other's line-up and that is like the law. Okay? You cannot bat in any order you want. You have to bat in your line-up. And, if you don't, then that player will be out. Well, guess what? Fifth or sixth inning rolls around, our opponent's up to bat, the guy who comes to the plate is out of batting order. And I was like, "Yes."

Because, the rule is as soon as my pitcher throws that first pitch, that guy's out. He took a pitch out of order. He's out. So, I wait, the guy is up there and I'm looking and I'm like, "This is perfect. Fantastic."

Pitcher throws the pitch, "Time, blue!" and I walk out and I was like, "Here is the batting order. This guy is out of order and so he's out."

And right away the opposing coach comes running out of the dugout like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold on a second. Okay, listen. I meant to make the switch in between innings. I should've done that. Sorry. Listen, this is league championship. Let's not like make a big thing out of nothing."

I was like, "Whoa, what are you talking about? What?"

And he and I get into this thing and it's getting heated and whatever and I look at Junior over here and he is white. Like, this is literally his worst nightmare of what could have happened umpiring. And he's just listening and whatever and we have all our words in and then we both turn and look at him and he says, "Well, let's play ball."

"I'll be right back."

I go into the dugout and I get my rulebook and I open the rulebook and I say, "Hey, man. Come here. Listen. I know you're kind of new at this, but here's the rule that says. Here it is. If you bat out of order, this guy's out. And I realize there's all these people watching and this is kind of embarrassing. But, listen. The guy's out. This is a rule."

And this is what he says to me. It's burned into my memory for all of eternity. This is what he says to me. He says, "Coach, this is how we're gonna play today. Thank you."

What? What? This is how we're going to play today? What does that mean? What are you even talking about? You can't play baseball saying, "This is how we're going to play today." You can't do that.

We went on and we won that game, by the way. God is sovereign and He's just. God's judgment, I'm just saying. This is how we're going to play today? What is that? You can't play baseball that way. It creates total chaos. And I want to take that a step further. You can't live your life this way. We can't say today, "If you get picked up by the police, you are guilty until proven innocent. That's how we're going to play today."

That doesn't work. We can't say, as we drive through the city, "Green lights mean stop and red lights mean go. That's how we're going to play today."

You can't do that. Unless you're on a bicycle and then you can do whatever you want. You can do whatever you want. You know what I'm saying. This is how we're going to play today? That doesn't work. It creates total chaos. So, I want to just submit that to you guys that you get this. Whether you like the idea of judgment or justice or not, you get this. If we don't live within some kind of boundaries, something that holds this thing together, it's chaos. It's chaos. It would make no sense. It leads to chaos.

So, I think you'd agree with the premise that this world had plenty of foolish umpires in it. And this world has plenty of racist cops in it. And this world has plenty of crooked politicians in it. And this world has plenty of greedy executives in it. And, for the love of God, would someone please come and make it right? Would someone set some order back in place? And I think, you guys, this is the story of the Old Testament. I'm not even going to jump ahead to Jesus. That would be so easy. I'm not even going to jump ahead to Jesus.

You're the survey. Survey said that you were struggling with God's character and judgment within the Old Testament context, and I want to tell you we're going to look at that tonight and I think you're going to see a God who is just and who loves. A God whose grace falls on the righteous and the wicked. That He holds all of these things together and that He's a good judge.

So, we're going to do a flyby on a couple Old Testament texts that you've already been reading if you've been reading with us through The Year of Biblical Literacy. But, before we get into these two stories, I want to kind of reshape the lens of when we talk about what judgment would've meant for Israel. What they would have heard and thought about when they heard about a just God or God's judgment. You see, our lens is very different than what Israel would have interpreted and all of the ancient Near East would have interpreted as judgment.

When we talk about judgment from an Old Testament perspective, we're essentially talking about God's rulership, His kingship, His authority over what He has created. And we have a hard time with this. We have a hard time with this. We don't live with kings, we don't live with queens and, unfortunately, we don't even live with princes anymore. I know. A moment of silence for the greatness. Thank You, God, for Prince.

This can trip us up because we don't live in this context. This doesn't make sense to us. When I say the word "judgment," what probably pops in your head is an old white man in a black robe behind a big mahogany desk holding a gavel, and that would be right. That

is our context for a judge and for judgment. But, that is not at all the way Israel would have thought about judgment or being the judge. They would have known that judgment came from only the highest authority in the land, and that would've been the king, the one who held all the authority over his land.

And that king, or his given representative, would be the only one that could make judgments over the people. That's the only way it worked. If the king is the judge, then his judgments are deeply connected to his kingship and his people. And this is the shift, okay? Listen. All this week, all next week, as we go in through the year, there are going to be judges sitting in courthouses throughout this city and they're going to be making decisions, maybe good, maybe bad, I don't know, about people that I don't know and the consequences that really have literally no affect on my life. I am not connected to the judgments that are made in our culture, predominately.

Especially in this city. I'm not connected. They don't affect my every day life. This is so different than what a kingship would have been. A kingship would have been all the people gathering in the kingdom and bringing before the king their issues and problems and troubles. And the king, if he's a good king, makes decisions not just in the best interest of himself, but for his people and for his entire kingdom. That's what a good judge would be, and that's what we see Israel seeing God as, as a good judge.

So, when we talk about God's judgment, we're talking about His rulership. The concept, the idea, that God knows what's best for all that He has created, His domain, and that He's trustworthy to oversee it. That's the way Israel would have thought of God as judge. This is strange to us, but not strange to most of human history. In fact, the entire narrative of the Bible, from Genesis 1 all the way to Revelation, is this concept that God is creating a kingdom of His own from scratch. He is creating a kingdom of His own and that it's a good one and that it has order and that it produces life. Then that life is good and it has order and it produces more life. And this is the way it is supposed to be set in motion.

Interestingly, the first time we see the word "rule," "to rule," or "rulership," this oversight or this authority and judgment, it's right at the very beginning in Genesis 1. It says, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and wild animals and all the creatures.'"

Jump down to Genesis 1:28: **"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the first in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"**

So, this is a remarkable move. This is a surprise. It seems that God's plan is to rule His authority, His kingdom, through us. He is handing the keys to His people, to His image-bearers, with the hope and assumption that being His image-bearers we will go forth and be the judges and the rulers that He would be. That's what's going on here. In fact, I would argue that's the entire narrative of the Old Testament in one story that God is continually trying to set up humanity as good rulers, as good overseers, good judges of His creation.

And yet, that doesn't work. It continues over and over to fall apart. So, that is the way Israel would have understood to be a judge, to be a king, to be a ruler or be an overseer. So now, I want to look at how God deals with this failure. How God deals with the missteps of His people. And I want to look at it on the micro level in an individual's life and then on the macro level, the story of an entire people group. So, to look first at the micro level, I want you to turn with me, if you have a Bible, to Genesis 4. This is an incredible story of God's character that, for some reason, gets looked over and not talked about much, but I think is a dynamic story.

Genesis 4. About a man named Cain. And it says this:

Genesis 4:1: **"Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.' Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.**

**"Now Abel kept flocks," – he was a shepherd – "and Cain worked the soil."**

He was a farmer or a gardener.

**"In the course of time Cain brought some of his fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his**

flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must...' – what? – "...rule over it.'

"Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?'

"I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?'"

Which I think is like one of the most smart ass remarks you'll ever hear in the Bible, by the way. If this was my kid? [whip sound]

"Am I my brother's keeper?'

"The Lord said, 'What have you done, Cain? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opens its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'

"Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'

"But the Lord said to him, 'Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.' Then..." – check this out. Listen – "...the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

That's where we'll stop. What an incredible story of God's character and His judgment. Let's walk through this step by step. Cain is holding back from the Lord from the very beginning. It says that he brought some offerings to the Lord, but that Abel's offerings were the best of what he had. Abel's offerings were honoring God. They were a sacrifice to Abel. They cost something. They were the best of what he had that he was giving to God. Cain was just bringing some of what he had, and God could tell his heart.

And God, even in that moment, God doesn't squash Cain. He doesn't squash him. He puts His arm around him and says, "Cain, listen. Don't be angry. Don't be jealous. Don't freak out. Alright? Do what you know is right and you will be accepted. If you don't, there will be consequences. But, I have given within you, Cain, the ability to make that decision; to rule over that thing outside crouching at the door. I've given you the ability to do that. So, listen. It's up to you. I'm giving you good counsel here."

Cain blows that off. He goes into the field; he murders his brother. And this incredibly poetic moment happens where God confronts Cain and He says, "Do you understand that the blood of your brother, the injustice that has happened, is crying out to me? I don't ignore that."

God says, "I don't ignore that."

I want to pause for a moment. Can you imagine? We live in, historically, the most violent, war-torn time in human history. Can you imagine the blood that is crying out for justice? That God must be hearing? And I'm telling you, we know this from who He says He is. He doesn't turn a deaf ear to that. It matters to Him. And so, He casts a judgment on Cain. And we can look at this and we could say, "Man, doesn't Cain get off easy?"

The author here kind of puts us in a bind, right? He puts us in a bind. This is a murderer. A lying murderer. And I want to ask you: what would be your judgment on Cain? What judgment would you ask against him? Would you ask that God destroy Cain? Put him down? Would you ask that God would turn a blind eye and let him loose? We have to think that way. What is the judgment we want? Because, we are Cain. We are Cain. And we have to live

under that same judgment. It has to be equal across the board.

So, the author puts you in this really precarious place. Does God let Cain off the hook and turn a blind eye? Does God exact justice and destroy Cain? He doesn't do either of those. God, in His justice, He hears the cry of Abel's blood and He cannot and will not ignore that. So, what happens is there becomes a distance between God's presence and Cain. The same as what happened to his parents, there was a distance and now a greater distance from God's presence.

And we may say that that sure is light. "Man, that sure is letting him off the hook."

But, I want you to look at Cain's words, because Cain didn't feel that way. Listen to what he says. His response: "This is more than I can bear. Whoever finds me will kill me."

To Cain, this is a death sentence. This is a death sentence. But, watch what God does here. This is incredible. God puts a mark on Cain. God puts His mark on Cain and says, "No. That will not happen because you are mine."

And God claims Cain as His own. Murdering, lying, smart-mouth, all of it. He claims Cain as His own and He puts a mark on Him identifying Cain with Himself and Himself with Cain. Who does that? What judge does that and says, "I will stand in harms way for you?"

It's incredible. This is a huge moment. And, if we look rightly, we see this throughout the story arch of the Old Testament. And we'll get there. So, is this justice? Yes. Is this compassion? Yes. God does not destroy Cain for his sin. He spares him because He loves Cain. He loves him. But, He will not overlook the injustice. And, furthermore, God stays committed to the big picture. That while there is also this micro story of what's going on with Cain and his family and his life, there's a macro story that's also going forward, and God never takes His eye off of that.

God's character and judgment are good and patient and kind, and yet He does not put up with rebellion or disobedience. This will be the story for all of humanity. God's judgment is a good thing. This is one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament of God's character and judgment on this micro, personal level. God gets so involved with Cain's life and He enters and connects Himself to Cain's story. A brutally sinful and broken man He connects Himself to.

So now, let's look at the character of God and His judgment over a people group. And that will, of course, be Israel. So, if you would, jump with me one more time to Exodus 5:22. And, to set the story up, this is the story of Israel as they have been sitting in slavery for 400 years. They're being oppressed by a dominate king who is just using them and abusing them. And Moses has been sent to tell the people, "Don't worry. God's coming. Something's going to take place. This will not be your circumstance any longer."

And this is where we pick it up.

Exodus 5:22. It says, **"Moses returned to the Lord..."** – after speaking to Pharaoh – **"...and said, 'Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people [Israel]? Is this why you sent me? Every since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all [by the way].'**

**"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my might hand he will drive them out of his country.'**

**"God also said to Moses, 'I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself fully known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.**

**"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.'"**

What we see here is God remembering His promise to a people and God stepping in and intervening for an entire people group. Church, this is not an easy topic. But, this is something I think we need to identify more strongly with as a church; as a people group. To better understand the goodness of God's judgment, we have to understand the plight of the oppressed. And we don't do that. We don't do that enough. Church, I just want to say – David Lomas touched on this a little bit and it kind of ticked me off because he was stealing my thunder. But, some of our discomfort with God's judgment may be our own culture and power bias, especially if you are white in this church.

And I get it. That's not a popular thing to say. But, it may be, if you have a problem with God's judgment, because you identify more with Pharaoh than you do with the enslaved people of Israel and how their heart would have been yearning and crying out for someone, for that God far off and distant that they have been crying to, to show up and smash and crush the head of their enslavers. Church, we have an ugly history in our country of the church being silent when people are being oppressed. We need to own that and we need to put ourselves in the place, identify a little bit more with those that have suffered and are suffering. If we do that, I guarantee you you will see God's judgment and liberation very differently. I have.

Dave Lomas mentioned it last week in an interview, a podcast that he was listening to, that for so many people in the black church, to hear that there was a God that would come and destroy the oppressor, to destroy the enslaver, "Amen. Yeah. That's the God I want."

They would celebrate this judgment of God. It would be a very good and positive thing. And that is a part, you guys, that we just don't spend time identifying with at all, and we need to repent. It is as simple as that. We need to repent and open our hearts to that. It will shift the way we see God's judgment. He hears the cries of His enslaved people and He acts. He does something about it. He liberates them. It matters to Him. But listen, He also loves the oppressor. He fights the oppressor, but He loves the oppressor. This is the incredible character of who God is.

He gives Pharaoh 10 times to make a decision; the right decision. Now, I want to ask you a question: I have three little kids. If you guys came up here after service and one of my daughters was up here and they're kicking you in the shin and I say, "Hey, baby, don't do that. That's not nice. We don't act that way." And they continue to kick you in the shin and I say, "Seriously, honey, stop kicking the nice people from church in the shin. They're not going to want to hang out with us if you do that."

If I did that 10 times, you would say, "You're an idiot and you're an irresponsible father," and you'd be right. That just doesn't – listen, who gives someone 10 opportunities to make a right decision and gives them little pieces of justice and little reminders like, "Seriously, don't mess around with this. Do what I'm asking you to do." Ten times. God is incredibly patient, even with Pharaoh who is the representation of everything that is anti-God. An enslaver of people, a god unto himself, an extractor of everything that is good in the world for his own greed and his own pride. And God is patient, even with him.

But, He will not stand for injustice. So, this amazing thing happens, you guys. It's called "The Passover." God goes to liberate Israel, His people, and the way He does it is He says, "There must be an atonement. There must be a punishment. There must be something that takes care of this injustice. And it's going to be for all people. It's going to be for everyone. Pharaoh's had his chance. Israel, if you want to be my people, then you have to listen and obey."

And He gives them a mark, this symbol, to put on their doorway. As an entire people group, the blood of this innocent lamb, the atonement, is put on the doorpost of every house. And they're given a choice. Maybe there were Israelites who didn't do that and they would've suffered the same consequence as Pharaoh's family. But listen, does this ring familiar that God puts a mark on those He claims as His own? The same as He did with Cain.

He said, "These are my people. Here is your symbol and your mark. I will put this on you and people will know you are mine and I will go before you and I will deliver you and you will be my people."

And he begins to create an entirely new kingdom. Just like we saw in Cain's story, God connects Himself to suffering people. He enters their story. He marks His people as His own as He marked Cain. Alright.

As you guys have been reading, you know the story that happens with Israel. Here's the

irony: Israel gets liberated and brought into their own land where they get to set up the place that God had created for them. And the assumption, again, is God is giving the keys to this people group and He says, "Go be the people that I am to the world. Show the world who I am that you might draw all nations."

And then you read Judges. You want to read about judgment? There's a whole book. It's called "Judges." And they're a mess and they do terrible things; horrible things. Read Judges 19. We read it last week in church. Horrific things within the nation of Israel. But, God doesn't stop there. Then He gives them a king, a literal king, to set up their kingdom. And that doesn't get any better. It continues to unfold and unwind and unravel and it's a mess. Until finally, God comes to the place where we started tonight. He says, "No more."

Now, this is the irony: God exacts the same judgment on Israel's king that He did with Pharaoh. "You've become just like Pharaoh. You're supposed to be my people. You're supposed to be different. And yet, you're exactly the same."

So, He destroys – utterly destroys – Jerusalem, and Israel is scattered among its enemies and they're put into exile. And this is where this incredible prophecy comes from Isaiah. So, what is the hope then? What is the hope of this people? I want you guys to watch something real quick.

[Video]

"There's this beautiful poem that's in the book of Isaiah."

"The city of Jerusalem has just been destroyed by Babylon, a great kingdom in the north, and all of these Jewish people, they've been sent away into exile. But, a few remained in the city. And there it left wondering, 'What just happened? Has our God abandoned us?'"

"Right? Because, Jerusalem was supposed to be the city where God would reign over the world to bring peace and blessing to everyone."

"Now, Isaiah had been saying that Jerusalem's destruction was a mess of Israel's own making. They had turned away from their God, become corrupt, and so, their city and their temple, were destroyed."

"Yeah. Everything seems lost."

"But, the poem goes on. There's a watchman on the city walls and, far out on the hills, we see a messenger and he's running towards the city. He's running and he's shouting, 'Good news!'"

"And Isaiah says, 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news?'"

"Beautiful feet?"

"Yes. The feet are beautiful because they're carrying a beautiful message."

"What's the message?"

"That despite Jerusalem's destruction, Israel's God still reigns as king and that God Himself is going to one day return to this city, take up His throne, and bring peace."

"And the watchman sang for joy because of the good news that their God still reigns."

"Now, in the New Testament, we find this same phrase: 'the good news.' It's the Greek word 'euangelion,' and it's also sometimes translated with the word 'Gospel.'"

"So, when Christians say, 'Do you believe the Gospel,' they mean, 'Do you believe the news?'"

"But, not just any news. In the Bible, this phrase is always about the announcement of the reign of a new king. And, in the New Testament, the Gospels use this phrase to summarize all of Jesus' teachings. They say that He went about proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom."

"So, Jesus saw Himself as the messenger, bringing the news that God reigns."

"Yes. But, the way that He described God's reign, it surprised everybody. I mean, think: a powerful, successful kingdom, it needs to be strong, able to impose its will, able to defeat its enemies. But, Jesus said, 'The greatest person in God's kingdom was the weakest. The one who loves and who serves the poor.' And He said that you live under God's reign when you respond to evil by loving your enemies and forgiving them and seeking peace. This is an upside-down kingdom."

"Now, Jesus also said that this kingdom was arriving with Him."

"Yeah. So, for example, there's this really interesting story where there's a high-ranking Roman officer and he comes to Jesus begging Him to heal his servant. And He even calls Jesus his Lord, acknowledging that Jesus is his authority. Jesus praises this man for recognizing what no one else yet had. That not only was Jesus announcing God's kingdom, He was the King."

"And so, the word gets out that this Jewish man from Galilee is talking and acting like He's the king of Israel. He's appointing 12 disciples, which are an image of Israel's 12 tribes. He's healing people and forgiving people of their sins."

"And all of this so threatened Israel's leaders that they finally decide to have Him killed. And Jesus let them."

"Yeah. Which is a weird thing to do if you're trying to become king."

"That's right. But, for Jesus, this is what had to happen. Jesus saw the sin and the devastation of His people, Israel, as just one small part of the entire human condition. How all of humanity has rebelled against God, resulting in the tragedy and devastation of our whole world. So, how is God going to bring His reign over such a world? Jesus believed it would be through an act of sacrificial love for His enemies. This is why, in the Gospels, Jesus' crucifixion is depicted as His enthronement as the King of the Jews."

"Yeah. He receives a crown. He also receives a robe."

"He's exalted up. Not onto a throne, but onto the cross."

"How beautiful are the feet that bring good news?"

"And the good news, now, is that Jesus has defeated death and that He reigns as King. That He's dealt with our sin and corruption Himself and that He's conquered it with His life and with His love."

"And then, Jesus sends His followers to go out and keep announcing this good news of the upside-down kingdom."

"And to invite everyone to give their allegiance to Him; the King who defeated death with His love."

[End video]

Church, as we close, I want you just to hear this: that there is no questioning the suffering that you individually have lived through and that we live in in this world and in this city and this time. And yet the hope is that a King has come, He has returned and He has given us an entirely new way of living out His kingdom in our world. And do you understand if you're, tonight, one who would profess to be a follower of Christ, that those keys have been handed to you and to me? And that God expects that we would be His kingdom people in this city, in your neighborhood, with your family and that is how injustice is dealt with by the love of Christ in you and in me.

And, if you're not a believer in Christ, I want you to know that there is one, there is a King, who cares so deeply, loves so deeply you, regardless of what your story is, He could not bear to be separated from you. He offers you to become one of His own; one of His sons, one of His daughters. He loves you deeply.

And lastly, church, if you call yourself a person in this church, in any church, I want you to know this: if there is any place that God's anger rises up the most, it is when the people of God do nothing; when the people of God stay silent to the injustices of this world. Read into the New Testament. What is Jesus most angry about? He's most angry at those who call themselves God's people and yet they don't lift a finger to deal with people's burdens.

So, does God get angry? Yes. He does get angry when any of His people are oppressed and harmed and it goes unhealthy with. Does God get angry? Yes. When the poor and the neglected get untended by the church. Yes, He gets angry. And, most of all, when His people, us, who are entrusted to rule rightly and do justice, instead do nothing at all to show the world who He is.

Church, don't take this as shaming, don't take this as guilt, please take this as encouragement that this has been done for you. And now, all you have to do is live into that. Be the people of God.

Let's pray.

God, I thank You for this time. I thank You for my brothers and my sisters. Most importantly, God, I thank You for Your generous grace. That You are never content to be far from us, Lord, though we create distance from You. How beautiful are the feet of the one who brings good news? Thank You, Jesus, that You run to Your people. That You run to us, Lord, with this beautiful invitation to follow You, to live into Your kingdom that Your kingdom may come here in San Francisco as it is in heaven.

God, would we believe that? Would that resonate in the fibers of our very being that heaven wants to be here with us, Your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven? And God, You want to do it through us. You will return one day. God, You've entrusted us in the meantime to tend Your garden, to pursue our neighbor, to fight for the oppressed. Thank You, Jesus. I pray that we would see this, not just as an assignment for us, Lord, but as the very nature of who You are.

May we worship You in that now. In Jesus' name, amen.