

Good morning, Horizon. I have a question. My question is this What is it about the end that makes us sometimes a little anxious or a little fearful? I think that we fear the end because of conspiracy theories, false depictions of hell in artwork throughout the years. I think sometimes we fear because we take Scripture out of its context and we repeat it without actually knowing what it really is or what's really happening in that passage.

So as we wrap up our series on the end game, we will see that there is hope in the end. But with the hope that comes in the end, there is an urgency for us to stay focused on what matters and on our and our goals that we have for us. So the portion of passage in Isaiah that we that we're going to talk about, so the portion of passage that comes before the scripture verses that we're going to talk about today, the people are crying out to God.

They're kind of angry with God. They are returning to Jerusalem. They after the exile, and it's difficult for them. The temple is still in ruins. Now, the temple was very, very important for them. We'll talk about that in a little bit later. But the temple was still in ruins. They were there were political difficulties. There were religious difficulties and challenges.

And so they're kind of angry and so they turn their anger to God. So they're kind of there. There's this tension, this conflict, this drama between God's people and God. Now, I want to talk for a moment about tension and conflict and drama for a minute. Part of the ordination process that I'm in right now includes participating in two years of residency.

So for residency, I travel to Junction City, Kansas. It's pretty exciting place. Anybody ever been there? Yeah. All right. So anyway, so I travel there and I meet with other colleagues. Well, right now what we are doing is we are we are learning this tool called Leading out of Drama. Now, for some reason, they think pastors and deacons of churches experience drama sometimes, sometimes even in churches.

Anyway, this tool called Leading Out of Drama is to help us focus on and actually lean into drama and conflict. Because when we do that in good ways, in positive ways and compassionate ways, we can actually have positive movement out of drama. Now, some of you might be conflict resistant. Maybe you're even fearful of conflict. Maybe you avoid it at all costs.

But even if you are in that category, most of us, we can agree that good, healthy arguments and disagreements are essential for good, healthy, meaningful relationships. I think there something has happened to us as people of God. I think especially in this culture, in this country, because when we pray, it's often one sided, like there is no conflict between us and God.

A lot of times we say our peace to God, we pray to God, and then we move on. And I don't think that we often get angry with God when we pray. And I think that's largely because we are fearful of what we might hear. I saw this picture on the Internet the other day. It says, Why are we so terrified for God to speak to us?

And then it says, It is because we know that when God speaks, we must either do what he asks or tell him we will not obey. Yikes. That's kind of true. Now, this is kind of why we stop. We stop the two way conversation, the two way communication and we just go back to saying, God, here's what we want, and then we spend no time listening or searching for an answer.

But if we are never conflicted by our faith, we probably are not listening to God. So back to the Israelites. They're conflicted. They are angry. They are lamenting to God and God responds to them. So we'll read this in verse 65 one and God responds to Isaiah, and Isaiah tells this to the people. He says, God says, I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask to be found, by those who did not seek me.

God said, Here I am. Here I am to a nation that did not call my name at times, especially recently. You will hear Christians in this country saying that this nation must turn back to God. And that's exactly what this passage is, is saying. God is saying that the nation of Israel failed to turn back to God.

But I wonder how many people who declare our country far from God, are ready to hear what is required of them. Like, are we ready to listen to God to do the difficult work that God might be asking us to do? Or when we say we need to bring our nation back to God, are we really actually just pointing the people at the others over there and say, well, they need to change, then our country will be back?

Maybe you heard on the news recently, this month, the last couple of weeks, something is happening in our country and there is a revival going on at Asbury University. It's on a college campus. On February 8th, several students there was a routine chapel service. They had just a normal chapel service and on several students stayed after for the for the after this, the normal service chapel service.

And they posted it on social media and more students showed up. And thousands of students and people in the community and around the world have been packed in that chapel 24 seven since February 8th. Now, in this chapel, they are singing there. It's spontaneous, right? There is nothing planned. People get up and start singing. And the chapel just joins in there singing.

There's worship, there's prayer, there's testimonies. Now, I don't I don't know exactly what is happening there. There's there are a lot of people who are really skeptical about what's happening there. And if you wonder, like, why are people skeptical about people singing and praising and praying to God for 24 seven since February 8th is still going on today?

I think people are skeptical about it because both Christians and on the non-Christian side, because some of us are tired of hearing that people love God and they love their neighbor and they seek peace and they seek justice, but then they do nothing except for speak empty words or worse, they speak words of judgment. But I don't know.

I don't know what's happening there. I cannot wait to see what will come out of this. Will they cry out to God and then listen to what God tells them? We'll see. But the entire Holy Bible, the Scriptures, the whole Scripture is about God's love story of creation. And God wants to bring us back. God wants us to restore to creation of what God intended.

From the very beginning, He longs to bring us back to him in Chapter 65 of Isaiah. God continues to speak. And this passage is really foundational to the biblical, biblical story. So the Lord says, for I am about to create new heavens and a new Earth, the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind, but be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.

For I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, in delight in my people. No more Shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress before

they call? I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear the wolf and the lamb shall feed together.

The lion shall eat straw like the ox, but the serpent, its food shall be dust. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my Holy Mountain, says the Lord. Now I want to point a few things out about this passage. First of all, three times in this passage, God talks about creating. God says, For I am about to create.

God says, Rejoice forever in what I am creating. And God says, I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. Now, there is a significant theological statement in this, and that's that God never stops creating and only God can create like anything new that emerges in this community or in any community, He will be God's creation.

Later on in the Book of Isaiah, God cautions them about rebuilding the temple. Remember that the temple is still in ruins and they're anxious about this because the temple is so important to them. And God cautions them. God says to them, Heaven is my throne and the Earth is my footstool. So what kind of house would you build for me?

What sort of place for me to rest? God saying right that the temple is important. But. But really, what can you create? When? When the entire earth is my footstool. Like the temple is important. It's good for you to come worship in the temple. But then the whole rest of the earth is also my creation. So here in this passage, we find this phrase it says, For I'm about to create new heavens and to understand the kingdom of Heaven.

The heaven, the kingdom of Heaven that we expect here on Earth, which is the end game, the one that we read about over and over again in the New Testament. In order to understand this kingdom of Heaven, we need to understand the Old Testament and the Old Testament, and we need to understand what they believed would happen to them when they died.

Now, to understand this, we need to, to first look not at the word heavens, because it wasn't about going to heaven when they died. But we need to look at the word Sheol. Now, Sheol is found in the story of Jonah. Jonah in the big fish. And Jonah refuses to listen to God and he ends up on this ship and then he ends up getting thrown overboard and swallowed up by this big fish.

And while Jonah is in the belly of this big fish, he thinks he's going to die. I would also think I was going to die if I was in the belly of a big fish. Right. He thinks that this is the end. And so he cries out to God. And I want you to look at three different translations of Jonah.

Chapter two, verse two. The first one uses the word Sheol. It says, I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me out of the belly of Sheol. I cried, and you heard my voice. The second translation, the Seib says, from the belly of the underworld. I cried out for help in the Navy, says, From deep in the realm of the dead, I called for help.

And you listen to my cry. Now, Sheol, just like many other Hebrew words, is really hard to translate into English. But Sheol was the place in the Old Testament show over and over again, was the place where you would go when you die. Now the author of a book called 70 Hebrew Words Every Christian Should Know kind of explains this word a little bit more.

And he writes that translating Sheol into grave is not a bad choice. But he also explains that there's kind of two different English translations of grave. First one is the actual burial plot in the final resting place

of us. And then the second one is the condition or state of being dead. And he says that the second translation better fits what the authors of the Old Testament were trying to convey.

You go not to heaven, because heaven is where God resides, but you go into the ground of a place of rest. Now, in the Old Testament scriptures, when you die, you give up your spirit, and spirit is translated as breath. You. Your body goes into the ground and your breath, your spirit goes back into creation. Now, in the New Testament, there are really four main passages that say what it will be like for us when we die.

It doesn't say that we will go to heaven when we die in the Scriptures, but one of these four passages, all four of these four passages have the same idea of what it's going to be like for us. And that will be it will We will be with Jesus. Now, one of these passages you'll probably recall is when Jesus was on the cross and next to him on another cross, there was a thief and Jesus turns to that thief and says, Today you will be with me in paradise.

Now, paradise sometimes we think about as translating it into heaven. But heaven that's not actually the right translation. Paradise actually translates into Eden as in the garden, Eden as in that imagery of of heaven and earth as one. So if in the grave is where the people in the Old Testament believed that you would go when you died, then Jesus came to conquer the grave.

Jesus came to conquer death. And now, because of our faith in Jesus, we will be resurrected from the grave, just like Jesus. The New Testament, the idea is taught that Christians will have a bodily resurrection, just as Jesus did. So when we die, where will we be? Where will we go? We will be with Jesus. The word heavens.

Now let's look at that. The word heavens was first. First found in Genesis one. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now, do you notice that heavens is plural in the Hebrew Scripture? Heavens is always plural, and it's called shaman. And it's also translated as skies. So through the skies. Right. God created the skies and the earth.

In the Jewish tradition, there's these also these layers of heaven. There's seven layers of heaven, which is where we get the phrase seventh heaven. It's the holiest of the holiest places in Judea, Judaism. It's the highest level of happiness in this seventh heaven. Now, for ancient thinking, God was in the sky. And we understand that through poetry that was written and that was understood because anything that was exalted was set up high.

And that is how they viewed it. So we have these different words. We have a eretz, which is Earth or home of the living. We have Sheol, which is home of the dead or the resting place. And then we have Shimon, which is heaven's God's dwelling place. Now, in the beginning, God's space and earth overlapped, right?

They overlapped. And because of because of humans, sinful nature. Nate Nature. God was kind of separated from us because of what we did. But God, space and humans space overlap. And we, we, we read about that in Jacob Jacob's story from the Old Testament. And Jacob had this dream where there were where he was experiencing God. There was a staircase and things were going up and down and he was on Earth and he was experiencing God.

And this was surprising for Jacob. He's like, Why is God here? God is supposed to be in heaven. And so God has this dream or Jacob has this dream about God kind of being present on earth a little bit. And so he named this place Bethel. And Bethel becomes really important and people come to worship at this place called Bethel because that is where they could encounter God.

So they would travel to, to Bethel to, to encounter God in this space. Now God is set apart from because of human sin, but yet he's found in the temple. The temple is where they can go and experience God's presence. But we know that God's footstool, right? We just read is all over the earth. But they come to the temple to explore science, to experience God.

But then Jesus comes and Jesus says, Now I am the temple. Now He is the cornerstone. He says He is the first stone. Jesus says, Destroy this temple. And I will raise it in three days. And there the people around him respond to Jesus and says, Wait a minute, it's taken us 46 years, years to build this temple and you're going to raise it in three days.

But then the scripture goes on to say that that the temple that he was speaking of is was Jesus was his body. So now when Jesus is here on Earth, now we encounter God not in the temple building, but in Jesus. That's where we encounter God. And then Jesus was resurrected and he is He ascends and the Holy Spirit comes to the church.

And then remember the story of Pentecost, where the little fire is above everybody's head, just as the fire was above the Tabernacle. And that's how they knew where God was. So we, the church, now, become the temple of God. The Bible project calls it little mobile units of God's temple. That's what we are. We become where people encounter God.

It's both a personal challenge and a corporate challenge for us. But we come to this space together as the church, and then we are sent out for the rest of the week to be little mobile units of God's temple, like God is dispersed through the people who believe in Jesus. And when we come together, it's really powerful and it's something special happens when we come together and we're in it.

God is not fully in us, right? It's here. God's here within us. But. But not fully. And God's here on this earth. But. But not fully yet. We still have work to do. We still have goals to be to. To look at. We are now where God, space and human space overlap. We are many temples walking around. We when we do the things that God wants us to do, we show others who God is.

And that is a great responsibility because until God's space in heaven, in our Tel God space and our space completely, fully overlap again, we will live in tension. And if we don't do anything about the tension, then God will say to us, I was I was ready to be here. But you did not seek me. Pastor Probyn, when he was here last week, he talked about a people with no vision, and he was quoting Proverbs 29:18 where it says Where when there's no vision, the people get out of control.

But whoever obeys instruction is happy. The end game is when heaven and earth are fully reunited. And in Revelation, another place where we get to hear about what it's going to be like in the end, it says that it will be a place where there's no more tears and no more pain and no more suffering. That's the hope that we are moving toward.

We still have a future. There is hope for the future. God promises that to us. And we have this great responsibility of being God's temple in the world. But in the meantime, before the end, we focus on

goals. We focus on things that we can do. And when you look at our three goals that we have for our church this year, I mean, they kind of seem a little bit insignificant.

When you just look at them. But if you look at them with the end in mind, they're really, really powerful. So the first one is we need to make sure that we are grounded in Christ in all that we do. And as we solidify our mission and our vision and we create values around who we want to be, we will do it.

We will be doing that because Jesus is our Lord and Savior. And the second goal, we will work on justice in our city, and we will collectively gather with other faith communities, other churches in our city to make an impact in our city. We will seek ways to do better together, to do a greater good, to allow those who have lost their way to find peace and know about the hope of Jesus.

And the third goal is that we're going to focus on a discipleship path. And that's so we can be more like Jesus, that we can grow to be more like Jesus. Now we say in the Lord's Prayer the prayer that Jesus taught. We say we pray. We pray thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

That's what we are praying for. We want God's will to be done here on Earth. But do we actually want that? Because if we are little mobile units of God's temple, that means we have work to do. So what are we going to do about God's will being done on Earth? Now that that's a question with an answer that is both hopeful and urgent.

Would you pray with me? Gracious God, we come to you in prayer, but we admit that sometimes we don't actually stop to listen to you. Sometimes we don't actually pause long enough to hear what you are actually saying to us. Sometimes we feel like we've had we have our mind made up that we know. We know our faith.

We understand the journey. We understand what we think you want on this earth. Help us to be your people. People that will listen to you, people that will seek you and do your will here on Earth. God, we have a great responsibility. We have this incredible opportunity to allow other people in our community to see what you are about, to see that you are a God of love and God of peace and God of hope to to know that that in the end you have this great plan for us that you promise that that we will live in a place where there will be no more tears and no more suffering and no more

pain. And for some of that, some of us that's hard to wrap our heads around. For some of us, we're in pain right now. We're hurting right now. We're grieving right now. But there's hope. Help us see that hope and help us be that hope in our city. God, we see all of this in Jesus name.

Amen.