

Isaiah Chapter 10 Sermon Notes

Why a ‘re-introduction’ to the book of Isaiah, the ‘Majesty’ book is occasionally necessary. How we need to make sure that our understanding of God is in line with the God of the Bible, for it is all too common for people to *settle for a god-concept* (a concept of God that fits their sensibilities and religious affections). Is there a concept of God that can’t take you to heaven? Absolutely (Scripture addresses false faith, heretical faith, temporary faith, natural faith.)

According to J.I. Packer, an accurate knowledge of God is *anything but merely an academic knowledge*. For those who truly know God, there are very clear marks of this knowledge of God (see also **Phil 3:7-10**) (pp. 27-31).

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

And Packer lists these in, *Knowing God*. The marks of those who know God include:

- 1.) They have great energy for God
- 2.) They have great thoughts of God
- 3.) They show great boldness for God
- 4.) They have great contentment in God

When I first begin reading the major prophets all the way back in 1972 and ‘73, I was startled, even amazed, that God is *sovereign over evil*. I remember reading that he sends one nation against another. He builds a nation up into an empire and then defeats it and carries them away in chains. And so, I thought, this is incredible. He is perfect, holy, and yet he is able to direct the actions of evil people for his purposes.

As I thought about this over the years, I’ve tried to find examples that would perhaps put this into categories we can relate to. *EX. I remember reading about a homesteader in the middle of the American mid-western prairie*, in the 1800’s; where there is some of the most fertile land in America is in this area. Prairie grass can reach over 6 feet high. This particular man was farming in a drought year, one morning a stiff-hot wind was blowing. As he stood there with his family, the prairie was on fire as far as the eye could see—the entire horizon was a wind-driven inferno of towering flames and

smoke. His children began crying, “What do we do. The flames are coming at us?” The man prayed and then he said, “We’ll do what will surprise you. We’re going to light a fire behind our home and let the wind blow it in the prevailing direction away from us. Once that fire has burned the land behind our property, we and our farm animals will then have a safe place to stand. This is all part of this amazing concept that God can use something destructive for ultimately a good purpose. (EX. Add dentist drill illustration.)

We’re shocked at some of the language in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations. God says to his idolatrous people, I’ll bereave you of your children.

“I will winnow them with a winnowing fork at the gates of the land; I will bereave *them* of children, I will destroy My people; they did not repent of their ways” (**Jer 15:7**).

He warns the impenitent habitants of Judea through the prophecies of Jeremiah, that He will create conditions during the siege that will produce cannibalism. “I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another’s flesh in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them” (**Jer 19:9**).

These things shock us and startle our sensibilities. And, it behooves us to know in light of these realities if we have but a small god concept. ***This small god concept is a plight in the West right now.*** The prevailing view within the small god concept is that people imagine that God accepts moral effort and sincerity instead of perfect obedience and faith in the truth. Here are some additional symptoms of this concept: People imagine that God is a Santa Claus-like figure who exists to serve people’s needs (help their finances and their marriages). They often envision him like a democratically elected official who receives the popular vote.

The vast majority of people I talk to when I share the gospel, are clearly relying on something they do rather than relying on what God has done in Christ. When we look at that commandment in **1 Peter 3:15**, it talks about our responsibility why we have the hope of the eternal life in God. “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15).

That hope is squarely resting upon what Christ has done and not on what we have done. It’s interesting that even in the old testament, there were religious leaders that had a small God concept. It says in **Psalms 10:13**, the religious person who is an unbeliever tells himself that God will not require a reckoning for his sins (a denial of divine omniscience, holiness, and justice). “Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said to himself, ‘You will not require it’” (Ps 10:13). (“I’ll get away with it.”)

It also says in **Psalms 50:21** that the unsaved religionist imagines that God is just a

large version on himself. “These things you have done and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state *the case* in order before your eyes” (Ps 50:21). This benign, harmless God concept does not inspire reverence and fear. How different is what Jesus is taught that we ought to fear God, not people, because God is able to destroy in hell (Matt 10:28). “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28).

There are additional symptoms which also show who has this small god-concept. One of the most telling of those symptoms is not being cautious about falling into sin. The man or woman who fears God, diligently turns away from sin. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate” (Prov 8:13).

Now, lest we think that a small god concept is something we develop maliciously, let’s remember that our tendency to think in a man-centered way is natural to us. As one pastor said, (actually Steve Whitten), “All you have to do to become a humanist is leave your Bible closed for a while.” ***EX. A small view of God is like the mildew and mold that grows in your shower.*** You don’t have to do anything for it to grow—it develops by itself. So, if Scripture is not our constant source of knowing who God really is, we will instinctively shrink our concept of God. We must be devoted to his word, if we are to worship him rightly. The word of God corrects our small-god thinking especially as feed on the book of Isaiah.

Pastor Pete and I want you to know that one of the reasons that Isaiah is in the canon of scripture is to correct our emaciated small-god concept. We think of King Ahaz (who is addressed by God through the prophet in the first 8 or so chapters of Isaiah). He comes to mind because he epitomizes a religious person who is unsaved. ***He has a small-god concept.*** He does not see as Isaiah sees; namely that God is the One who is in control. Therefore, Ahaz contents himself with a compartmentalized god whom he imagines bestows things like a vending machine through a series of religious transactions. Ahaz is willfully ignorant of God’s plan to glorify himself through the covenants he has made with Israel (in particular, the Davidic covenant). He should know better, he is in the royal line of David). Ahaz makes the rebellious mistake that is inherent in all false religions. He tries to make God the client, and himself the patron.

This idolatrous approach conceives of a manageable God, but it is a damnable error. This kind of rebellion is rife in the western world. In fact, the insistence that God must meet our standards of equality and fairness is actually the lie of salvation by works, but in disguise. It buys into the old error that God can be obligated by religion

and moral effort (as if God were repaying a debt of human merit).

I'll refer to these individuals as "small god-ders." Small god-ders insist that human choice is the final foundation and the last word when it comes to salvation. I think one of America's most eminent theologians, B. B. Warfield who beautifully corrects that error in his book, *The Plan of Salvation* (in which he calls the error of salvation by a human decision as 'auto-soterism'—a failed plan to save oneself).

Warfield lived in the early part of the 20th century and used to listen to students preach at Princeton Seminary chapel. When Dr. Warfield was asked, "How do you decide which of these students to invest in?" This was his answer: "The only pastors that God is going to use mightily are big God-ders. Those are the ones I invest in." "These 'big-god-ders' have a biblical concept of God's greatness." By contrast, small god-ders envision a god who is a domesticated deity capable of being chained like a lion, merely a personal coach for your spiritual journey. A divine buddy who fits in your vest pocket, no more dangerous than Santa Claus.

Natural religion is filled with the small-god-concept. Jesus will say, "I never knew you!" to such as these (**Mt 7:23**). How different is the God of the Bible! He is transcendent in holiness. He sustains the time, space, and mass continuum in which we live. Human existence is His idea—He thought us up for His glory and pleasure. We are formed in His image; our identity is derived from Him. He is the self-existent original.

He told Moses in **Exodus 3:14**, tell the children of Israel that "I am has sent you." By contrast, the false gods of the nations were local deities that were relative to the creation. They coexisted within the creation and fit into a pantheistic world view. How different is the God of Scripture! For it says in **Job 34:14**, if God were to withdraw his spirit from the creation, everything would collapse into lifeless piles/heaps of matter and dust. Listen: "If He should determine to do so, if He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (**Job 34:14-15**).

So, what I want us to see as we go through Isaiah, is that God is sovereign over evil, over history, over the ascendancy of nations and empires, over individuals, and angels and demons. (EX. That theme of His sovereignty over armies and empires and their military campaigns takes up about this much of your Bible. . . . *pinch almost ½ inch of your Bible between your thumb and forefinger.*)

If you are honest, you'd have to admit, that you can't wrap your mind around that; you don't have a logical, rational category in your mind for that kind of divine control which is absolute but does not violate the will of a man. Speaking of the Egyptian bondage, the Psalmist says, "He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal

craftily with His servants” (Ps 105:25). Language like, God stirred up the heart of, or aroused the Medes, or hardened the heart of, etc. is remarkable. And, of course you don’t have that category because you cannot take God’s measure nor relate Him to something in the creation itself (as if you were to say, “Yes, God is a lot like . . . a rainbow, or a happy dad.” “No, you can’t fill in the blank).

For, when we as finite beings are confronted with God, we are rightly baffled, we do not possess the power to conceive of God’s wisdom in how he leads an evil nation against another nation and brings ultimate good out of it (we are to bow before Him in His infinite wisdom and might).

I think about how the epidemic of the small god-concept thought has followed urbanization everywhere it goes. Burgeoning city-life is characterizing much of the western world today. Farming has become a corporate affair. Agriculture is now mechanized, and folks have increasingly become city dwellers.

It’s interesting that in urban areas, secular humanism/liberalism is the dominant world view. And, what do see in the city? Man’s works; skyscrapers, super highways, all manner of transportation, people hurrying everywhere; scurrying about as if it’s their last week on earth. We see countless sources of stimuli, the lure of the life of luxury plastered on billboards, the latest gadgets that will supposedly enrich our lives, and a seemingly endless availability of goods and services at our fingertips. The attitude that ‘Human ingenuity can solve everything’ dominates the urban landscape.

But, it is a very different an existence it is in rural areas. In the countryside, the tallest man-made object may be a silo or a barn. But those structures are dwarfed by the purple mountains on the horizon, by the towering cumulous clouds, and the star-filled night sky (and in a fierce storm, from horizon to horizon is the zig zag of lightning).

In fact, people who engage in dry-farming (no irrigation, my Iowa relatives), know that their subsistence is utterly dependent on God’s favor and providence. If the rains do not arrive, their crops will fail. Not surprisingly, we find a more God-centered, God-dependent, theistic world view in the countryside. By contrast, cities have become centers of liberalism and progressivism (atheism).

Of course, the solution is not to get off the grid and move to a farm. But, what we are saying is that extra energy, discipline, and effort is needed to think rightly about the sovereignty of God when you are immersed in a small-god concept culture—which we are. We should ask ourselves why do people want a small-god concept?

That is because small-god concept doesn’t require holiness, repentance, and surrender. A small god can nicely coexist with your imagined self-determination. A small-god concept can be adapted to your man-centered ethical system. A small god-

concept is not disturbed or provoked by your idols (any more than Aaron's golden calf was bothered by the wickedness of the Israelites in the wilderness).

By contrast when we think about the immensity and infinite power and wisdom of the God of scripture, we think about how radical a miracle is necessary for us to be reconciled to Him so that we have His favor.

We could cast this as an equation. The smaller your God concept, the less grace you imagine that you need for salvation and victory (EX. I asked a believer to share his testimony of salvation from sin. "I lived a very moral life"). The greater your concept of God, the more you realize you realize how much grace you need.

Theologian Charles Hodge commenting on Paul's prayer in **Ephesians chapter one** verses 19-20 said the following, "The same magnitude of power needed to raise Christ from the dead is also exerted when God grants the new birth to a sinner." "And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:19-20).

What is the cost of retaining this biblical view of this transcendent God? The answer is we must repent of our propensity for small-god thinking. Admit your pride and idolatry of self, for that is why you prefer a small God concept. When through His infallible Word, you encounter God as He really is, there will necessarily be a kind of crisis. "The One who holds my life and eternity in the palm of His hand, I have offended Him and rebelled against Him."

Ask yourself this question: "When was the last time you have this thought: I worship the God who uses peoples, armies, nations, empires, rulers and kings for his own purposes?" If the answer is, "seldom, or never," it is time to begin studying the O.T. in earnest that you might know God as He really is.

How mighty and wise must God be to direct evil while his holy integrity and purity is flawless and is exalted in the process of His providence. When God manifested his glory, at the dedication of Solomon's temple, He also warned that if Israel became an idolatrous nation, God would raise up a wicked nation to destroy His own temple in Jerusalem. And the ruins of that temple would serve as an object lesson to the watching world (1 Ki 9:6-9). "But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So, Israel will become a proverb and a byword among

all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’ ‘And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the LORD has brought all this adversity on them’” (1 Ki 9:6-9).

Let’s be clear today, the small god-concept is but a figment of man’s imagination. There is no such thing as a small god. If you are a child of the one true God through salvation in Christ then the almighty infinite God of the universe has invaded your life. And, you are not your own, you are bought with a price, you no longer belong to yourself (1 Cor 6:19). You have been purchased by the Son of God and are His possession.

And, your saving knowledge of God is joined to you knowing for sure what God has done with your sin. Your hope is not just that he has forgiven you, your hope is resting upon the truth of God’s testimony that He has charged your sin to Christ’s account. And by our Savior’s bloody death, divine justice against your sins have been met. Christ became legally guilty of your sins so you could be legally forgiven (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). My friends this is nothing less than the heart of the gospel.

Apart from God’s self-revelation in Scripture, we have no concept of how dangerous God is to impenitent sinners. All false religion including a small-god-concept religion, has some form of human effort at self-protection from God, whether it is religious rituals, ceremonies, church activities, or penance. The vast majority of the human race even in America, have settled for a false spirituality that is not the gospel.

How remarkable that this almighty God who raises up empires, brings them down to nothing, this is the same God who brings sinners to himself and whose love is epitomized in Christ willingness to be that suffering substitute who is the friend of sinners (1 Jn 4:10). God’s Word is a life or death situation for us. It is always a **Fork in the Road** as to obedience or disobedience.

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **I have set before you life and death**, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deut 30:19-20).

Those who truly have Christ as Savior are, by God’s grace daily putting sin to death, they are destroying what remains of indwelling sin (Col 3:5-8). They do not make a

habit of giving fresh expression to the sins which Christ died to destroy. Through the grace of God in Christ, the true believer is an overcomer of the world, the flesh and the devil. The false believer is ruled by his sin; therefore, he is not an overcomer—even if he names the name of Christ (it is overcome sin by the grace of Christ or be overcome by sin). **Revelation chapter 21** tells us in no uncertain terms that it is only overcomers who will inherit heaven.

“He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:7-8).

It is our hope and prayer that it is your desire to profit from the study of Isaiah, but in order to do so, you must be willing to lay your small god-concept to rest, to put it in the dust, and to seek God as he is revealed in his Word.

Reflecting upon Anthony Bourdain’s death, and the reality of being an eternal object lesson. (A humorous, gifted, witty, warm, honest culinary tour-guide to the world—made us feel we were there, a chef’s window to cultures of the world.)

On his life philosophy: “Life is complicated. It’s filled with nuance. It’s unsatisfying... If I believe in anything, it is doubt. The root cause of all life’s problems is looking for a simple answer.” (See **Jn 8:32-36**).

“... thanks to my sins of excess and poor judgment and my inability to say no to anything that sounded as if it might have been fun. ... [When I die], I will decidedly not be regretting missed opportunities for a good time. My regrets will be more along the lines of a sad list of people hurt, people let down, assets wasted and advantages squandered. (See **Phil 3:18ff**.)

One-time personal motto: “Your body is not a temple, it’s an amusement park. Enjoy the ride.” (See **1 Cor 6:19**).

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (**Mt 12:36-37**).

On God's sovereignty over the nations:

“At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant *it*; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.

So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Behold, **I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you.** Oh, turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds. But they will say, ‘It’s hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart” (Jer 18:7-12).

“and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “**Just so will I break this people and this city, even as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot again be repaired; and they will bury in Topheth because there is no *other* place for burial.** This is how I will treat this place and its inhabitants,” declares the LORD, “so as to make this city like Topheth” (Jer 19:11-12). (Place of burning, human sacrifice.)

“Thus, says the LORD God of Israel, “Behold, I am about to turn back the weapons of war which are in your hands, with which you are warring against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the wall; and I will gather them into the center of this city. **I Myself will war against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm, even in anger and wrath and great indignation**” (Jer 21:4-5).

“How the hammer of the whole earth has been cut off and broken! How Babylon has become **an object of horror among the nations!**” (Jer 50:23).

The LORD has opened His armory and has brought forth the weapons of His indignation, for it is a work of the Lord GOD of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans” (Jer 50:25).

“Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers! **The LORD has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes,** Because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it; for it is the vengeance of the LORD, vengeance for His temple” (Jer 51:11).

“*He says,* “**You are My war-club, My weapon of war; and with you I shatter nations, and with you I destroy kingdoms.** With you I shatter the horse and his rider, and with you I shatter the chariot and its rider, and with you I shatter man and woman, and with you I shatter old man and youth, and with you I shatter young man and virgin, and with you I shatter the shepherd and his flock, and with you I shatter the farmer and his team, and with you I shatter governors and prefects” (Jer 51:20-23).

“***Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?*** Why should *any* living mortal, or *any* man, offer complaint in view of his sins? Let us examine and **probe our ways**” (Lam 3:38-40).