

“God’s Challenge: Tell the Future”

Isaiah 41:1–29

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We will start by looking at the first two verses of Isaiah 41. Isaiah 41:1–2 says *[1] Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment. [2] Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, so that he tramples kings underfoot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow.*

In this chapter God is addressing the people of the world, in a sense, people of others faiths and He is challenging them to consider evidence as to who is the true God. It is crucial that we know who He is and what He would have us do. We live in a day where things are getting kind of dark spiritually and culturally. Reading from the Wall Street Journal from September 4, 2015 the title of the article says ‘Clerk in Marriage Dispute is Jailed.’ This was in Ashland, Kentucky. The article said; “A Federal Judge jailed a Kentucky clerk on Thursday for contempt after she repeatedly defied his order to issue marriage licenses to gay couples. Kim Davis, the Rowan County Clerk, had unsuccessfully appealed all the way to the high courts to delay an order by the judge that she issue marriage licenses to all qualified couples gay or heterosexual.” So she is in jail for obeying God’s law. Ms. David said she became a Christian in 2011 around her mother’s death and that she is going to obey God. She is committed to follow Him with all her heart, mind, soul and strength so she is in jail in Kentucky.

In a book titled Statism; The Shadows of Another Night that has recently come out, it is saying that things are starting to get dark. It has different writers for different chapters in this book, from PCA pastors to great theologians, men of God. John Frame says in this book on statism, secularism, Islam and Christ that ‘today Christianity is involved in a great cultural struggle. Two chief adversaries are secularism, the belief that society is best off without belief in God, and Islam which believes the god of Mohammad and the Koran should be supreme in every society. Secularists often claim that there are no absolutes but in practice and often in theory they support the absolute authority of the state over all human affairs. So for them the state replaces the Christian God. This is called Statism. The Apostles called on Christians in Scripture to respect the civil magistrate and to obey it in so far as its commands do not contradict God’s commands but if they do contradict, don’t obey.’

The founders of our nations adopted the first amendment to our Constitution which is the principle of the freedom of speech and religion. Governments since then have often tried to erode this amendment by limiting its scope. The recent Affordable Care Act requires corporations to purchase insurance which covers pills thought to be abortive by many Christians. John Frame goes on to say that ‘Americans who wish to preserve and extend political freedom, therefore would be wise to treasure the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Scriptures are our strongest weapon against Statism. They also provide a powerful defense against the other major ideological opponents of Christianity in our time of Islam.’

In Isaiah's day God was challenging these other religions and approaches to life. He calls them to draw near for a test – let's have a trial as to what is truth and as to who really knows that. God says in Isaiah 41:1, *[1] Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment.* In other words, let's come up with a trial to determine what is right and wrong here.

Then there is the prediction of the coming One from the east here. Isaiah 41:2 says *[2] Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, (He has him conquer nation after nation.) so that he tramples kings underfoot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow.*

Who is this One who comes from the east who conquers everybody? We see that He is talking about a man by the name of Cyrus.

God says in Isaiah 46:11, *[11] calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.* It is the same person He is dealing with in Isaiah 45:1 which says *[1] Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed.* He is dealing with something that is going to happen in 150 years from that point. Isaiah lived around 700 B.C. Babylon was going to conquer Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in 606 B.C. almost 100 years after Isaiah and they would be in captivity for 70 years because of their rebellion against God but then God would raise up a man, Cyrus, who would be the head of the Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus would conquer Babylon and then would free Jews and they would return to rebuild Jerusalem and live there.

God is telling us here in Isaiah, over 150 years ahead of them, what would happen when they are released in 536 B.C. to go back and rebuild. He is challenging them to see if there is anyone else who can tell the future like that, any other gods or people like that. He is obviously in control here.

How does a liberal theologian handle the Word of God? I went to seminary under a number of liberal theologians and they have trouble with God predicting the future like that so they came up with what is called duetero-isaiah, second Isaiah and it picks up right after what we've been reading here in Isaiah 41. They would say that the duetero-isaiah tells about this man Cyrus who comes and does these things. No, there is no such thing as duetero-isaiah and even if there were it wouldn't solve the problem because Isaiah 53, which would be a part of that duetero-isaiah that they come up with, predicts what will happen not just 154 years later but what would happen 700 years later when Jesus came.

Isaiah 53:6 says *[6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* This Messiah would die for our sins. Isaiah 53:5 says *[5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.* It says He will make His death with the wicked for He died between two thieves and He was buried in a rich man's tomb. He was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. In Isaiah there was 700 years of detail that was going to happen and that's just one illustration of that. Over and over and over God tells the future in His Word.

Think of the structure of the Old Testament where Moses and the Israelites were in Egypt in captivity under Pharaoh and God plans that He would bring all these troubles upon Pharaoh. Pharaoh would finally let them go and then God would have them travel through the wilderness to take them to Canaan. He would get them out of Egypt by having the angel of death go throughout the land to kill the oldest son in every home except where the blood of the lamb was placed over the doorpost of the home. If the blood was there the angel of death would pass over that home. The Israelites had the blood of the lamb over their doorpost and you can imagine what happened in that one night. In Egypt virtually every home had a son who was killed except the Israelites with the blood over the doorpost. You can imagine the horror and Pharaoh says they can go.

That picture of deliverance not just from Egypt but from bondage to Satan for Pharaoh was a picture of Satan, for bondage is what all of us start off in as sinners. We are in Egypt in bondage but God offers deliverance to us by blood of the true lamb, Jesus Christ. The very day they would offer that blood of the lamb on the doorpost, Jesus would die on that day 1400 years later, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month. Moving it to Isaiah 53, duetero-isaiah doesn't solve anything here, but Isaiah is going to prophesy what is going to take place in 30 plus A.D. when Jesus comes along.

There are amazing prophecies in the Old Testament. There is the prophecy of Jesus being born in Bethlehem. In 700 B.C. in Micah 5:2 it says [2] *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* Then there is Zechariah in 500 B.C. who prophesied that He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and the fact He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Judas would throw down that silver in the temple, go hang himself and then the silver was used to buy the potter's field. There all these things prophesied over and over again. There is no other region in the world like this for this is unique to Christianity. There is overwhelming evidence of the truth of Christianity.

Then there is the question of the control of the earth in Isaiah 41:4 which says [4] *Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.* This talks of His sovereignty for He is controlling all of this. He says "I did it and I can tell the future. I am in charge."

Next is the preparation of the craftsmen where He is calling for this big showdown of all these false gods. He tells them to come together and we'll challenge you. So here is a picture of Him getting ready to go meet with them. Isaiah 41:5–7 says [5] *The coastlands have seen and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come.* [6] *Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, "Be strong!"* [7] *The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, "It is good"; and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.* There is going to be a big test and you need to be firm on the foundation. Who is the true God there?

There is His companionship with Israel in the midst of whatever they face. Isaiah 41:8–10 says [8] *But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;* [9] *you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off";* [10] *fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will*

*strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* Fear not is what God says to every Christian.

Isaiah 41:11, 13 says *[11] Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. [13] For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you."* Here He is comforting them. Think of the clerk in Kentucky who took her stand and now she is in jail for refusing to do something she knows is wrong. She is standing up for her faith. Is God going to be with her? Yes, whatever happens God will be with her. Nothing can touch her without His permission. She needs to not fear but be confident in Him and trust Him. If He lets her stay in jail He will use it for her good. *[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28) Think of the implications of all of this for us, for our grandchildren as we turn against God's standards way after way after way.

Notice the provision here for their needs in Isaiah 41:17–18 which says *[17] When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. [18] I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.* God will be with you. God will meet your needs. God will provide.

What is our greatest need? He has given us new hearts. My greatest need was a new nature and He has given us that through His Son. He has provided for us when we die. If you're a Christian Jesus tells us not to fear death. In John 14:2–6 Jesus says *[2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. [4] And you know the way to where I am going. [5] Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" [6] Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

We have to surrender our will to Him as our Master. Matthew 16:24–26 says *[24] Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [26] For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"* If we say we're going to live our life our way to save it then you'll lose it. Whoever loses his life, give it to Him, will save it. He has provided for us and when we surrender our will to Him and put our trust in Him as God the Son who died for us, then that is our approach for that is faith in Jesus Christ. We're not relying on ourselves. We are to surrender our will where we are purposing to obey. We won't always obey but we put our trust in Him alone as our approach to God. I am trusting that Christ paid for my sins. It's not based on whether we've been too bad or not. When we trust Him alone we're united to Christ and He has come to live within us.

He begins to change us and there is the evidence that I did commit my life with a growing transformation into obedience. It is like that lady, that clerk who said she would not disobey God. If it cost me my job or being in jail I will do His will. That is evidence

of her faith that is true faith. It is standing up in the midst of this world. This world is going the wrong way.

Notice the challenge here addressed to false gods who appear before God and show their evidence as gods. Isaiah 41:21–23 says [21] *Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.* [22] *Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen (tell us the future). Tell us the former things, (explain the past) what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come.* [23] *Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods (they can't do that); do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified.*

Christianity is unique for there is no other religion in the world that has anything like Christianity and telling the future. The Bible tells thousands and even hundreds of years ahead are given in great detail and it has all come about just as predicted. They couldn't answer Him at all and then it say in Isaiah 41:24, [24] *Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you.* The Living Bible paraphrases that verse like this; anyone who chooses you ought to have his head examined, talking about the false gods there.

What about our contemporary scene? Do we have anyone telling the future in our day, like God did? There are some modern instances of predictions. For instance, Jean Dixon in 1952 was kneeling before a statue of the Virgin Mary and she had a vision. She saw the President elected in 1960 being assassinated. Her vision appeared in Parade Magazine on May 13, 1956. John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. So she told the future. She also predicted six months ahead the assassination of Robert Kennedy and said it would happen in California. Now she missed a whole lot but she told those ahead of time. So how could that be?

There are some things in Scripture that have some instances of this type of thing where false things happen. For instance I Kings 22:19–23 says [19] *And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; [20] and the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. [21] Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' [22] And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' [23] Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you."*

The Lord directs some of these things but just think about the amazing uniqueness of Scripture. If a man is not determined to cleave to the truth, there will be an opportunity or rational to depart from the truth. He will try and convince himself that he isn't departing from the truth but he is. We see here that there is nothing else in the world that gives us a truth like the Scriptures give us the truth. There are many claims in the other direction but none of them present the kind of evidence that you have in Scripture.

We have to choose whether we are going to follow that as the culture starts going more and more the other way or am I going to stand up against it no matter what the cost? That's the challenge and there is a desperate need for this. We are to be salt and light in our culture. Christians are to make a real difference in the culture. We need the solid foundation of being in the Word of God to do that.

Let me challenge you. One way to get that foundation is to take classes at the Birmingham Theological Seminary. It started in 1972 because there was so much false teaching going around in our former denomination that we had to do something. So we started that Seminary. It is going strong to this day with extensions going around. Many of you have taken that training here and many have gone into the pastorate after going through the Seminary. Many who take classes here are just lay people who want a stronger foundation in the Word and are using it in many ways in their life. Pray about whether the Lord might have you take some classes at the Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Lyrics from the hymn How Firm a Foundation:

*How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!  
What more can he say than to you he hath said,  
Who unto the Savior, who unto the Savior,  
Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?*

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose  
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, I'll never, no never,  
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!*

That is truth and let's have that foundation in us and for our children. Make sure they have that foundation. No telling what we will face and what they are going to face. Let's be like that clerk in person who is standing up for the truth come what may. The starting point is to make sure you are in Christ where you have surrendered your will and put your trust in Him alone as your approach to God. Let's pray.

Prayer:

As your hearts are bowed have you made that initial surrender, put your trust in Him? If not, do so right now. Pray in your heart 'Lord Jesus, I surrender to You as my Master. I purpose to obey. I trust You to forgive me as a gift based on Your death. I invite You to come and live in me and make any changes.' Now Father, we thank You so much for Your Word which is the overwhelming evidence of the truthfulness of Christianity based on Your Word. Lord, may we be salt and light in our culture. We pray for Kim Davis, the clerk in jail and ask that You be with her, help her and use her mightily in Jesus' Name, Amen.

### Power Point

- I. The call addressed to all people concerning the true God (1-7)
  - A. The Prediction of the Coming One from the East (2)
  - B. The Question of the Control of the Earth (4)
  - C. The Preparation of the Craftsmen for the Event (5-7)

- II. The comfort addressed to God's true people (8–20)
  - A. Their Relationship to Him (8)
  - B. His companionship with Them (10)
  
- III. The challenge addressed to the false gods (21–24)
  - A. The Challenge (21–23)
  - B. The Conquest (24a)
  - C. The Consequences (24b)
  
- IV. The contemporary scene: is the challenge still good?