

# **The King of Zion and the Epicenter of God's Salvation**

## ***The Book of Isaiah***

### **The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor, Part 3: The Cry of Our Future Children**

#### ***Isaiah 58 – 59***

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#### **Introduction: Cut Back on Beef**

I want to challenge you today to do a very doable thing to help love future generations of people: our children and grandchildren. Why? Because they feel threatened, and they are threatened. A study of 10,000 young people across 10 countries was published just a few days ago.

“Some 45% of the 10,000 young people surveyed across 10 countries for the study, published Tuesday, said anxiety and distress over the climate crisis was affecting their daily life and ability to function. Three-quarters of respondents aged 16-25 felt that the “future is frightening,” while 64% of young people said that governments were not doing enough to avoid a climate crisis. In fact, nearly two-thirds of young people felt betrayed by governments and 61% said governments were not protecting them, the planet or future generations.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Philippines, a country very vulnerable to sea-level rise, 92% of young people feel climate anxiety. Meanwhile back in Boston, my son John and my daughter Zoe are 20 and 18 years old. And they are both in college studying to make a dent in climate change. They have both told Ming and me that they don't want to have kids, because what will planet Earth be like? In the U.S. alone, we're already seeing unprecedented drought in the West, fires raging through the forests, and Seattle reaching 115 degrees. We're seeing more hurricanes batter the Gulf, which come up to New York City to flood the subways with rain water. There's flooding in the Midwest. Fracking for natural gas destabilizes the ground, and is causing earthquakes. It's no wonder children feel threatened. I said to my children, “That's okay that you don't want to have kids. Just follow Jesus. And make disciples. I want spiritual grandchildren.”

What is the one most practical thing you can do? There is at least one thing we can do. Cut back on cow-related products: beef and milk products like milk, cheese, ice cream, and yogurt. I'll explain why in just a moment.

#### **For the Climate Skeptics**

Now I briefly address anyone who is a climate skeptic. If you do not believe that human beings are warming the planet through carbons, which is through fossil fuels, then I want to still persuade you. Here's how. Two points.

First, sustainability. Fossil fuels are going to run out anyway. At about the current rate, we will run out of oil by 2052, gas by 2060, and coal by 2090.<sup>2</sup> Not only that, but politically, it would be good to help other countries not be dependent on the Middle East and Russia for oil. It would be good to not risk oil spills on Native American lands or near rivers in general. So not only that, but local communities are being poisoned by the use of these fuels. We should invest in green, renewable energy even if you believe that we have no impact on the climate.

Secondly, risk management. What I'm wrong? And what if you're wrong? If I'm wrong, we should do these things anyway. If you're wrong, we don't get a second chance with a second planet. So once again, on the basis of risk management, we should invest in green, renewable energy even if you believe that we have no impact on the climate.

#### **Relevance**

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<sup>1</sup> Vicky McKeever, “Nearly Half of Young People Worldwide Say Climate Change Anxiety Is Affecting Their Daily Life,” *CNBC*, September 14, 2021; <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/14/young-people-say-climate-anxiety-is-affecting-their-daily-life.html>.

<sup>2</sup> MAHB Admin, “When Fossil Fuels Run Out, What Then?” *Stanford University*, May 23, 2019; <https://mahb.stanford.edu/library-item/fossil-fuels-run/>.

The title of this series is, *The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor*. So who are the poor? We started on Labor Day, and we looked at the Cry of Poor Workers, because the poor are always made to work for low wages in bad conditions. In week two, we looked at the Cry of the Sick, because the poor are always more sick than others. This week, we are looking at the Cry of Our Future Children. Why? Because our future children aren't around to speak up for their interests. So they suffer from a silence, a poverty of voice and power.

If it's true that only 'individual rights' matter, then our descendants really don't matter because they're not individuals yet. This is what the West just has not been able to deal with. This is why the West pushes off to the future environmental pollution, global warming, government deficits, the energy crisis, the global food shortage, the global water crisis, and so on. The truth is: we have not inherited this earth from our parents; we are borrowing it from our children. And we are leaving nothing left for them. It's taxation without representation across time. The idea of 'individual rights' is likely to be the fatal flaw of the West, especially since we give huge corporations more 'individual rights' than our future children.

And if the Lord hears their cry, then how does He answer? Well, Jesus is God's response to the cry of the poor, because he is the source of a new humanity. Jesus is God's vision of shalom which impacts every aspect of our lives. We will deepen in our love for Jesus, because we'll see him from multiple angles. And as a community, as Neighborhood Church of Dorchester, we can really help each other by being a learning community -- learning together and trying not to be judge-y but appreciating the principles that each person can express.

### **Context**

I'm going to move throughout the whole biblical story throughout this series, but also in this sermon. I'm going to start with the book of Isaiah, as I have in the past two weeks. Isaiah the prophet lived some 800 years before Jesus. The Jewish people had been a people for about 400 years. Isaiah served in the royal court at Jerusalem. He saw the abuse of power and the corruption. So Isaiah looked backwards to God's creation in Genesis, and looked forwards to the Messiah, Jesus, so much that the four Gospels tell the story of Jesus by quoting from Isaiah's poetry, and the Book of Revelation is built on Isaiah.

### **Exploiting the Poor Leads to Exploiting the Land: Isaiah 58:6 – 12**

We are looking at Isaiah 58. Isaiah says God hears the cry of the poor. Here is v.6 - 7, which we covered these past two weeks:

<sup>6</sup> "Is this not the fast which I choose,  
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,  
To undo the bands of the yoke,  
And to let the oppressed go free  
And break every yoke?  
<sup>7</sup> Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry  
And bring the homeless poor into the house;  
When you see the naked, to cover him;  
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

So if you've been with us these past two weeks, those verses should sound familiar. Isaiah hears the cry of the poor. But now he helps his people imagine what it would be like if they repented and heard the cry of the poor like God does. Listen to the image of creation as a garden. And keep in mind that when rich owners exploit poor workers, the land suffers. In the U.S. South, for example, the plantation owners exploited African American slaves and poor white workers, and depleted the land. The same thing was happening during Isaiah's time. If you don't respect the boundaries God put in place to protect the poor, you probably won't respect the boundaries God put in place to protect the land, which is God's gift to future children and grandchildren. So listen carefully to what Isaiah says next in v.8 - 12. God wants to restore the land to be a garden:

<sup>8</sup> Then your light will break out like the dawn,  
And your recovery will speedily spring forth;  
And your righteousness will go before you;  
The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.  
<sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'  
If you remove the yoke from your midst,  
The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness,  
<sup>10</sup> And if you give yourself to the hungry  
And satisfy the desire of the afflicted,  
Then your light will rise in darkness  
And your gloom will become like midday.  
<sup>11</sup> And the Lord will continually guide you,  
And satisfy your desire in scorched places,  
And give strength to your bones;  
And you will be like a watered garden,  
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.  
<sup>12</sup> Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins;  
You will raise up the age-old foundations;  
And you will be called the repairer of the breach,  
The restorer of the streets in which to dwell." (Isaiah 58:7 – 12)

Then in another 3 chapters, Isaiah adds:

So they will be called oaks of righteousness,  
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. (Isaiah 61:3)

So people will be oaks of righteousness, says Isaiah, a planting of the Lord. That's the next verse of the passage Jesus quotes in Nazareth, in the synagogue where he gave his mission statement. Oaks are big trees. They are landmarks. They help people know where they are. They give shade. They allow birds and other life to flourish in their branches. In Jewish thought, planting a tree is one of the most loving, selfless things you can do. Because you do all the work now, planting it, watering it, helping it stay healthy. But who benefits from the tree? Your future children and grandchildren. Other people's future children and grandchildren. Do I think we are meant to plant trees? Absolutely. It's one of the best ways to fight climate change, because trees capture carbon. Trees keep our cities cooler. The very language assumes we know the goodness of trees. But we as God's people are meant to be like trees. We are meant to be a blessing to future generations, people that we don't even know yet.

God wants us to live in a garden and be like gardens. A well-watered garden is beautiful, attractive. And God meant for Israel to be a light to the other nations around it. Not just because they said true things about God. But because they lived in a story in which you could also see, smell, taste, and touch the garden land that was a little sliver of the original garden of Eden that was God's original plan for the world. God has always wanted to live with His people in a garden land. That's why God put Israel where He did. It was physical. It was tangible. It was embodied.

Of course God also wanted His people to be gardens in ourselves. That's why we call the fruit of the Spirit the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22 – 23). And why Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; remain in me and bear fruit" (John 15:1 – 11). Our character is a joint project of gardening. We are partners with God in making our hearts good soil. We are partners with God in receiving the seed of God's word. We are partners with God in producing good fruit in our lives.

Illus: Here is Paul Malkemes who will tell a few stories of how his family and neighbors have done that here in Elmhurst Park and given their future children more hope.

"Morning everybody. I just want to share a couple of our stories in this neighborhood practicing creation care. Boston Project started in the mid-90s, and actually in the early 90s, creation care was considered, like, "Is that really Christian? Should the church really be doing that?" But as we've been on this journey, the church has embraced its role in creation care. One of the things I'm also struck by, as I share three quick examples, is that for us, creation care also interacts with other issues of justice. It's not just the garden and the trees, but as you're doing that, you're impacting other issues that are challenges in our neighborhood.

So let me mention the trees first. One of the things that is true of this neighborhood is that many of these trees were planted about 110 years ago. That's when the streets and our neighborhood were laid out. We were moving from farmland to a suburb of Boston back then. One of the things we noticed about 10 years ago is that a number of our trees were beginning to die. Neighbors would start to cut them down and not replace them. We saw this happening. We were concerned because our neighborhood has high rates of asthma. Trees help improve air quality. Our neighborhood can get really hot. Trees help cool that temperature down. There's really interesting studies of how trees improve safety. They're making these connections as well. So we said with our neighbors, "How are we going to plant trees that really my grandkids and beyond will enjoy – trees that I won't even see in their fullness today. Neighbors and other non-profits started planting trees here and there. We have a count going. In our 14 streets here, over the last 15 years, we've planted over 140 trees. Back there, there are a couple of pear trees we planted along the fence line there that we just planted this summer because the bigger pear tree getting diseased. We know that that's going to come down in 5 years.

Number two: creation care. So this park you're sitting in. When Glenna and I moved onto Elmhurst Street in 1996, this was all vacant land. During the summer, it was not cared for. Grass would be 3 – 4 feet tall. There was a lot of debris in this space: old car doors and oil tanks and tree branches and broken house windows. And that filled this space. Our children didn't have close access to a safe place to play. This is where they would play. Even with all that stuff I just mentioned, they would still come here, and this is where they would play. As neighbors, we came together and said, we need to change this. Our kids need a safe place to play. This spot needs a transformation. So back in the late 90s, we got together. We piled all the junk together. We had a neighborhood cleanup on a Saturday. The pile was so big – I can show you the pictures – that the city had to come in with bucket-loader trucks and a dump truck to get out all the junk in this space. Those oil tanks in your basement – the 250 gallon ones – we have eight of those just laying all over. So this was an environmental issue, a creation care issue, but also a kid issue. And our neighbors came together, and it took us 11 years of planning, designing the park as a neighborhood, raising the money ourselves and with other non-profits until we were able to open this in 2009. And really it serves us like a neighborhood backyard. We pray that as kids and parents and as you guys come into this space, that God's Spirit just rests on Elmhurst Park, and touches the people who are here with us.

Our neighborhood did this, and then we got super excited. Neighbors said, "If we could do this, what about the corner of Darlington and Norfolk Street? That's overgrown. That's abandoned." So we had an intergenerational team of older adults and teenagers all come together and design that. We wanted to make this the garden of peace. So they designed this beautiful sitting park where kids just catch the bus and people read a book. They built the garden of peace. That opened and then people said, "We need a garden! We need a community garden!" So we looked across the street and there was another vacant lot. And we all started working on that one, and we said to the city of Boston, "Hey, can you sell us these lots?" And just the way God does: \$100. We bought these vacant lots for \$100. And in the garden, again a justice issue, this is transformation project but it's also a health project. We don't have a place to grow healthy food as neighbors. So we worked another couple of years and built the garden. Actually, Grace Chapel did an offering at a Christmas Eve service that helped with that garden as well. Now we have gardeners and kids all the time gardening.

When Glenna and I moved to 11 Elmhurst Street, what we simply did as people who were renting, we said to our landlord, "Could we just garden in this patch of grass?" We didn't start with big transforming lots. We said, "Can we take this little patch that's overgrown and plant some flowers here?" And as we did that, we'd spend time talking with our neighbors, getting to know people, being proximate to folks.

The third example is not really my story, but one of my neighbors' story. So the bus garage at the end of Elmhurst Street, one of the auto-body shops. When we moved here, that was bus garages and one of the issues for our neighborhood – thinking about asthma and other things – is that this was before Boston had idling laws. The owner would let buses just idle in our neighborhood hours and hours and hours everyday. We were breathing in that smog and everything. That was the thing that started our neighborhood association. As neighbors we got together and said, "We need to deal with this. This is impacting my health." So we came together and that was our spark. We worked with that owner and we were able to get some changes. But he sold the bus garage to an auto-body shop. The auto-body owner came in and started

painting cars in there. If you remember – folks who’ve been around here for a while – the fumes: You could barely walk outside your door when they were painting. The fumes would just come across the neighborhood. The Hambergs said they couldn’t breathe. They said they felt trapped in their house because of the auto-body shop and the fumes. Then the shop was sold one more time. And Larry, who owns it today, bought the shop. Larry is a Christian brother who loves the Lord. He understood those environmental health issues. When he was getting ready to move in, he said, “I will not do any auto-body painting with the fumes that you’re experiencing today.” This was out of his Christian beliefs. He was one of the first auto-body shops in the city of Boston to move to water-based paints that have no fumes at all. He took the expense of that and made that transition because of his care for this neighborhood.

So those are just some examples of how we’re caring for creation in our neighborhood. One of the things I love – and Mako alluded to – is that the transformations that happen, we can see the physical transformations. At the same time I can talk with neighbors about the personal transformations happening in our own lives. I’m just thankful that God has used these places to do this.”

That is the work of God!!! Of course it touches our soul, in terms of our character. But it also touches us in our bodies, and others’ bodies. Because the Lord said, “You will be like well-watered gardens. You will be like oaks of righteousness, a planting to the Lord, a blessing to future generations.”

### **Isaiah’s Vision of the Garden Renewed**

So when we talk about how the Lord hears the cry of our future children and grandchildren, let’s think tangibly about this. Just in case you want to see this, read the book of Isaiah later, because Isaiah is so concerned about this. When Isaiah says that the Messiah will be born of a virgin, in Isaiah 7:14, that is amazing, but he’s saying that the Messiah will be born while you’re in exile, when your land is suffering, when your people is suffering. The present generation is going to cost the future generation something. And God’s Son is going to appear and he’s going to absorb some of that – he’s going to share in the cost; he’s going to share in the suffering of God’s people – because of what the past generation has done.

It is like moving into a space – or living in a space – where there is pollution and suffering because of it. As people in this neighborhood have made life here just a bit more garden-like, they have become more garden-like. But American evangelicalism tends to separate us from the land. Why? Because the heritage of American evangelicalism is in colonialism. And the whole point of colonialism is what? To exploit land and people. But Christ comes to undo the harm and renew all things.

And Isaiah’s saying all these things. No wonder why the great messianic hopes and visions of Isaiah have to do with not just with the Messiah’s going to show up and that’s cool for our souls, but the wolf will lie down with the lamb. That is Isaiah 11. Creation itself will be affected.

<sup>6</sup> And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little boy will lead them.

<sup>7</sup> Also the cow and the bear will graze,  
Their young will lie down together,  
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,  
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den.

<sup>9</sup> They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6 – 9)

Here’s another example, in Isaiah 55:

<sup>12</sup> For you will go out with joy  
And be led forth with peace;  
The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you,

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn bush [and we have to deal with unruly thorns because of the fall] the cypress will come up,

And instead of the nettle [which again is thorny] the myrtle will come up (Isaiah 55:12 – 13)

Now is this just poetic metaphor? Artistic, literary metaphor? Well, it is artistic metaphor, but does God mean less or more than this? More. There will be peace. There will be a reconciliation between humanity and the rest of creation so that nature itself will be more peaceful and safe. And Isaiah even said this, in Isaiah 65:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17)

Jesus came to be the new Adam, the new human, he would be a new Adam bringing about a new heavens and a new earth. So when we follow Jesus, we become partners with God, gardening ourselves because we are meant to be gardens where God walks. And we become partners with God restoring pockets and glimpses and slivers of the original garden of Eden wherever we are, so that we can pass down a good planet to our children and grandchildren.

### **Application**

So in that light, how do we hear the cry of our future children and grandchildren? We use fossil fuels in three main areas: farming, housing, and transportation.

Let's start with farming. The single most doable thing we can do is cut back on everything made from cows. Why? Because cows cost the most water and feed out of any livestock. You could eat the same amount of chicken as you do beef for 25% of the carbon footprint. So if everyone ate less beef – ate less cheese and ice cream and yogurt, too – we would reduce methane, carbon dioxide, and nitrous oxide. I know we can do this, because I haven't been able to eat beef for a few years: I'm vulnerable to gout. So I know we can do this! So, start with awareness. Consider how much beef you buy at the store. Or how many times you get burgers from fast food. Switch beef for other meat, or beans.

I'm going to give you 30 seconds to think and pray about how to reduce your interaction with cows. Then I'm going to have you turn to your neighbors and share.