

The high and lofty one coming to a sinner (Quality:Good)

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[0 : 00] Trusting in the Lord's help, shall we turn now to the chapter that we read together, Isaiah chapter 57, looking particularly at verses 15 through 18.

Isaiah 57, verse 15. For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy. I dwell in the High and Holy Place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth, for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him. I hid me, and was wroth. He went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways. Reveal him. I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him, and to his mourners.

Often in these difficult chapters in Old Testament prophecy, you do find groups of verses which speak very simply and plainly.

[1 : 33] And I'm sure these verses are easily understood. Maybe the context is not so easily understood, or all the connections in the context easily grasped.

But certainly these words are plain and simple in their teaching, aren't they? And I want to speak very simply this evening about these verses.

Merely, really just to remind you of things which I'm sure you already know so well. The speaker, who is the speaker? Who is saying these things?

Well, he is the High and the Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. The living and all-glorious God is the speaker of these words.

Sometimes in prophecy, you find that the prophet is speaking of himself, of his own experience. Sometimes you find the prophet is speaking of the future, and making predictions regarding the future.

[2 : 35] But there are times when the prophet is actually speaking or writing the word which comes directly from the mouth of God.

And so it is here. Isaiah, of course, was the instrument God used, but God was speaking directly through him. Thus said, the High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

And then followed the things which he is saying. We do well to pay attention when God speaks.

We must pay attention when God speaks. It is our great sin and shame that we do not pay attention when God speaks. We especially should realize the sin and evil of not giving heed when God speaks through his own dear Son.

And so often in these Old Testament prophets, I believe that we should understand this, that when God is speaking, he is speaking for himself. He is sending his word directly through the prophet to the people of the prophet's day.

[3 : 52] But there is a sense in which he is turning attention toward the future. And, of course, we now can look at the Old Testament scriptures in the light of the new.

We can look at these words in the light of the gospel. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is the word. The word incarnate.

And I'm sure as we look at these verses, we shall have to realize, and surely we shall realize, that it is only through the Lord Jesus Christ that we can experience the things which the Lord is speaking of in these verses.

I'll come back to that, of course, later on. But it is God who is speaking. And whenever God speaks, we should then begin to think of the preeminent way in which he speaks, through the living and the incarnate word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity.

[5 : 05] Some of you probably know that in my earlier days I was a scientist. I was trained as a scientist.

And I sometimes find my mind working in that sort of way, a sort of semi-scientific way. I've forgotten a lot of the science I ever learned.

But when I read an expression like that, the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, my mind immediately says, well, what is eternity?

I can understand time. I used to have to measure time and sometimes measure it very, very accurately. I can understand time and we all do, don't we?

We are people who live in a world in which time is moving on inevitably. I looked up at my clock in the study this morning and it said ten past twelve.

[6 : 05] Well, I knew it wasn't ten past twelve. I knew it was something like six o'clock. And I thought, well, the clock stopped. I knew that it was wrong. I knew that time moves on.

Even though the clock stops, time moves on. You can't stop time moving on. But what is eternity? And I sometimes think of time as though it were a line which has a beginning and an end.

And God has created that long line of time. He knows the end from the beginning. And he is the high and lofty one. And he lives above and outside of the limits of time.

And having said that, I realise I haven't really begun to explain the mystery of the eternal God. You say, well, it just means that he doesn't have a beginning and he doesn't have an end.

And of course that is true. But I'm sure it doesn't explain everything. It's a very important truth. He is without beginning of days or end of life. The Lord Jesus Christ is.

[7 : 13] The eternal God is. Outside of time. He is not limited by time. Now we are limited by time. We can't say, well, tomorrow I'm going to go ten years forward in my life.

And the day after I'm going to go twenty years backward in my life. We can only do that in our mind, in our imagination, in our memories. We are utterly held, as it were, by time.

And we move on through our lives. We are held by the grip of time, in a sense. But God is not like that. He is not held.

He is not limited at all by time. He is the high and the lofty one. He is above the limitations that we so often experience. We grow older.

We grow older. We grow weaker. Inevitably we do. There's no way in which we can hinder that process. I know the scientists are working desperately hard, working to try and stop people growing old.

[8 : 20] But they can't stop the march of time. But he is one who is ancient. He is eternal in that sense.

But he is timeless. He doesn't grow old. If we think of the words ancient or old as meaning something to do with time, then we cannot use those words in regard to God.

But if we think of someone outside of time, who can see the beginning of time and the end of time, and all that lies between the beginning and the end, then we can say, he is the ancient one, the ancient of days.

Because he is beyond the limit of days, and he is beyond the reach of time. He is the creator of all things. How do we measure time?

How do we know that time is progressing? We know it by the world in which we live, and the way God has fashioned the world. We've got night and day, we've got spring and summer and autumn and winter following one another.

[9 : 28] We mark out the passage of time in this way. But God is the one who has created all the things by which we measure time. He is indeed the high and the lofty one.

And it is good for us, friends sometimes, to bow in reverent and humble worship as we think of him, as outside of time and unlimited by time in the way that we are, and admire and feel a deep sense of reverence for the one who is so great.

For he is great. And then, what do we mean by the high and lofty one? The high and lofty one.

When I was at school, the tall boys were often given a nickname. They were called lofty. By that we meant they were tall. Of course it doesn't mean that here, does it?

But you say, well it says high. Doesn't that mean something to do with height? High and lofty. No, it doesn't mean that at all.

[10 : 40] But what does it mean? That he is the high and the lofty one. Well, just as he is outside of time and above time and is the creator of time and the controller of time, so we are to think of him as high above all the things which happen in the process of time.

He is high. He has authority. He has power. He has majesty. He has dominion. He is over and above all. He is high in that sense. If you meet someone who is very, very clever, you say, well, he's all above me.

You mean his intelligence is far higher than your intelligence. If you meet someone who is very famous, you say, well, he has a higher position than I have.

We understand it in that way, don't we? In our terms, we begin to understand it. But now, says God, I am the high and the lofty one. And he is high above all.

He is the supreme and all glorious one. He has all power in heaven and in earth. He is the great creator of the universe.

[12 : 00] He is the great sustainer of the universe. He is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. This is the God we adore.

We adore. Our faithful and changeable friends. And we need to think of his character, don't we? The high and lofty one that inhabits eternity.

Because, for one reason amongst many, in this life, and subjected as we are by time, and humiliated as we often are by the things of life, we do need to know.

We do need to know and have a relationship with the God who is high and lofty and inhabits eternity. We are creatures of a day.

We are weak and helpless and frail. We need to know something and have a real relationship with this great and holy one. But how can we?

[13 : 00] If he is so high and so above us, if he is so majestic and glorious, if he is so powerful, how can we have any kind of relationship?

Indeed, how can we begin to know him? There is a sense, isn't there, in which everyone has to recognise in the end that there is a God. And I think deep down in the consciences of all, there is some awareness of it.

Paul tells us that in the beginning of the official to the Roman. We have a conscience that is either the meanwhile accusing us or excusing us. But I am now speaking about something more than that general and universal awareness.

I am talking about a personal knowledge and a personal relationship. Because when things of this life are so troublous and distressing and threaten to overwhelm us, where can we look?

We have surely learned that in ourselves we have no great source of strength or ability. I was talking to a young lady only yesterday who was a nurse in an old people's home.

[14 : 19] And she's had tremendous responsibility recently. And she said, you know, one thing I have learned, and that is that I have no strength of my own.

Now, she was young, she was healthy, she obviously had physical strength. But that was her confession. And it's when we're facing the deep and real and pressing and hard, distressing things of life, that we realise our deep sense of inability and our weakness.

And we need the high and lofty one that inhabits eternity to lean upon and to trust him. We need him to help us. But then, of course, this chapter, as we read it through, must have struck me as being a very solemn chapter.

I mean, there's a great deal of sadness, isn't it? A great deal of sin is described. Sin in all its horrible aspects is described in this chapter.

Not just sin in general, but the sin of those who knew better, who had clear teaching regarding the worship of the living God and the sin of idolatry. Many ways in which their sin is described in this chapter.

[15 : 41] There are many ways in which God's threatening judgment is described in this chapter. And that is the background, really, of this verse 15, isn't it? The earlier part of the chapter.

And we see God in this chapter as a threatening God. A God who is indignant with the sin of people who do no better. God is like that, isn't he?

He's angry with the wicked every day. That is the character of God, the essential reaction of a holy being to the sin that he views in our lives.

He would be less than God and less than holy if he did not so react against what he sees in us. And again you may say, how can it be possible for such a sinner as I am to have any contact, any relationship, any real knowledge of this high and lofty one?

Well, certainly only as he reveals himself. certainly only as he reveals himself in a most amazingly wonderful way. What does he say?

[16 : 54] I dwell in a high and holy place. He is high and lofty. He inhabits eternity. Where does he live? Well, he lives in a high and holy place.

And when I use the word live in regard to the eternal being, again we have to understand that we're not talking about a mere human life, are we?

We are talking about the divine being with the divine eternal existence. And he is this high and lofty one who dwells in the high and holy place.

You say, well that settles it. I am sure he will have nothing to do with you. I wonder whether you've ever felt like that. Perhaps you know.

He will have nothing to do with you. He is too great, too high. He is altogether beyond me. He is majestic beyond all my thoughts or imagination.

[17 : 59] He can't have anything to do with you. I am so low and weak and sinful and insignificant and helpless and wayward and fickle and you can add words to words and many more words come.

And that's what we are. If we're honest with ourselves and honest before God, we would use many of those words and many more besides. Well then, we need something more to know, don't we, about this God.

I dwell in the high and holy place with him. Who? Who is the one he lives with, dwells with, abides with.

With him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit. Amazing, isn't it? I don't know what the other people think, really.

The people are not contrite and humble. I suppose some of them think they're good enough to meet with God any day. I suppose some of them think they're living such a good life that God has got to approve of them in the end.

[19 : 13] But the earlier part of this chapter should surely warn us against any such wicked idea as that. It is a wicked suggestion, isn't it?

That is self-righteousness in all its horror. I mean, that is human pride in all its violence. No.

I don't know what they think. I don't know how they feel, really. Perhaps they never think of God if they can help it. What are these people?

How do they think about God? The contrite and the humble ones. What is their attitude to God? I mean, what is your attitude to the high and lofty one whose name is holy, who dwells in this high and holy place?

And so, I know I'm unfit to meet and I know the things that he has described of my sin deeply distressed.

[20 : 20] I know I if I received what I deserved I would be finally condemned.

I would be forever cast out of God's presence. What is contrition? Isn't that something like contrition?

contrition? There are many things you could say about contrition I'm sure, but isn't that something like contrition? An inward sense of brokenness because of our sin, because of our spiritual adultery that's described earlier in this chapter, because of our worldliness, our ungodliness, our lack of faith, our proud spirit, but now there's a difference to it.

There's a broken inward sense of being under the mighty hand of God and we are brought down, certainly down in our own estimation, and we're beginning to see ourselves as God sees when we are contrite.

And there's another word closely connected with it, and that is penitent. When we are truly contrite, then we are confessing our sin, we are repenting of our sin, we are turning away from our sin.

[21 : 50] There's an inward change of direction. We are contrite. But it is this sensitiveness, this inward feeling of brokenness as before God, which makes us want to almost lay, as it were, on our faces in the dust before God.

And we hate ourselves when we are truly contrite. We hate our sin, and we are a humble spirit. Oh, indeed we are.

How could we be proud now? You know, I know that pride is ingrained in us all, and pride will never die until we die. It's still working there wickedly within us.

That's always true, sadly true. But you know, when you experience the deepest contrition, then you will be most humble.

I'm sure that's true, isn't it? when you feel the deepest spirit of contrition, and you will feel to be in the most lowly place.

[23 : 07] He is in the high and the holy place, and you are in the low place, where sinners deserve to be, and rightly are, in this low place.

But God says, and this is the amazing thing, there are two particularly amazing things that struck me in these verses. This is the first one. That having described his majesty, God then immediately says, but I dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit.

I said earlier, didn't I, that we can only really fully understand these verses in the light of the New Testament. And it is God dwelling with the contrite and the humble in and through the person of his own dear son.

I in them, and they in me. Thou in me, and I in thee, was the way the Lord described it in that 17th chapter of John. This is where the high and holy one stoops down to the contrite and the humble one, in the person of his own dear son.

his own dear son comes near enough to them to say, come, come unto me, for you that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.

[24 : 35] He is welcoming them, the ones who would have come to the conclusion that there was no way in which they could have any relationship with one who is so high and so perfectly holy.

That is not the only thing. That is a wonderful thing, that he should be so compassionate, that he should be so willing to stoop down.

You remember how it's said of the Lord Jesus Christ, he humbled himself to be born of a woman. He stooped down to come amongst men. He stooped down to be identified with men and women in this sad world.

He even came into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh, not sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that we could see him as close as it is possible for him to be, to fall and ruin sin.

Amazing thing, that he should come to dwell with those of contrite and humble spirit. And as he brings them into union and relationship with himself, I mean experimentally, they were eternally, but I mean personally and in experience, they come into that knowledge that they are now in relationship with the living God.

[26 : 04] It is through the Saviour who has come where they are, drawn them to himself, made them one with himself. Now what is he going to do?

Well, he has already graciously made them contrite. He has mercifully humbled them, but he is going to revive them. Because, you see, there is something about contrition and inward brokenness that we, because we are what we are, we could not bear it alone.

we could not just bear that alone. If we were going to have to endure that feeling of being utterly broken under the hand of Almighty God, we could not bear it.

In fact, that verse 16 puts it, I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wrong, for the Spirit should fail before me.

the Spirit would fail before me. So what does the Lord do? He says, when the Spirit is ready to faint away and fail altogether, I will come to revive the Spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

[27 : 31] Isn't that a lovely expression? To revive the Spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite ones. He comes to lift them up.

You remember the woman, bent down with a spirit of infirmity, and the Lord heals her and lifts her up. He did that literally, as a miracle of healing.

He does this spiritually, as a miracle of spiritual healing. comes to the one who is broken and in deep need, absolutely humbled right down into the dust, and he revives the Spirit.

He lifts them up, he gives them hope, he gives them a prospect, reviving the Spirit of the humble and reviving the heart of the contrite one.

I was preaching recently at home, on the theme of revival, it's a theme I gladly go back to from time to time because I'm sure we desperately need it.

[28 : 38] We need it in the way in which it is commonly understood amongst Christian people. That is, we need God to work mightily by way of conversion amongst the ungodly.

That's the way it's often thought of, isn't it? But you know, before that happens, we need revival in its biblical sense. We need it in our own hearts.

And we need it in the life of the churches that we're connected with. And I was saying to my own people, one of the indications that God is going to come and revive his work and his people is that he makes them contrite and humble.

It's one thing to pray, for revival. But it's another thing to know this inward contrition and humility as a prelude to revival.

And I wonder whether that is what is lacking. Perhaps we need to begin to pray further back as it were, further back along the road. And we need to be saying, Lord, bring me to that proper contrition of heart and humility of spirit, that I might know for myself real, revival.

[30 : 00] Will thou not revive us again? Thy people may rejoice in thee. You see, the Lord says, I will not contend forever.

In that situation where we feel God is contending with us and we are broken inwardly and our spirit is so deeply humbled, we cannot feel joy.

we feel the oppressive weight of our own shame and guilt. We feel the almost crushing awareness of the holiness of God.

And then God in his loving tenderness comes near to us and he begins to lift us up and encourage us and revive us. us. And it's like David when he says, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

And we do have either restored to us or given to us for the first time a sense of inward joy. This great and holy, high and lofty one has actually come to me.

[31 : 02] He has actually had dealings with me. He has changed me. And now he is strengthening me. He is reviving me. He is lifting me up. He is giving me a real joy and peace in believing.

He is restoring unto me the joy of my salvation. Don't we need such a reviving? You know, as I travel about and as I'm aware of things at home, so often it seems there's a sadness in people's conversation.

The older people are saying, oh, it's not like it used to be. The younger people are saying, well, I don't know what's gone wrong. There's this note of pain and sadness.

What a wonderful verse to pray over this is, isn't it? We do need revival, don't we? We need to be revived. This is the pathway, or at least part of the pathway, through which we walk as a prelude to revival.

For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth, for the spirit should fail before me in the souls which I have made. Verse 17 again goes back to the sad picture of the earlier part of the chapter.

[32 : 26] For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him. I hid me and was wroth, and he went on. Frowardly, that means with determination, with obstinacy and perverseness in the way of his heart.

I have seen his ways. Now, I said a moment ago, there were two very striking things in these verses to me, and here is the second one.

It's as though the Lord is going back over the past, as though he is reminding us of what we have been, our iniquity, our covetousness, how he smote us, how he brought us down, how he hid himself from us, how he showed his indignation.

And we were going on so obstinately in the wrong way, until in mercy he began to deal with us, and we kicked against what he was doing for a while, that he wouldn't leave us.

God said, I've seen his ways. You know, if I'd been writing these verses, I think I would have gone on something like this.

[33 : 39] I have seen his ways, and I'm sure God will come to rebuke him, and I'm sure God will come to chastise him. Wouldn't you?

Wouldn't you say something like that? Isn't that what seems the logical next step, if you know anything about your Bible? I have seen his ways.

What is God going to do next? He has seen all these things. He has seen these evil ways. And we'll heal him. And we'll heal him.

You know, we sing sometimes amazing grace, don't we? Amazing grace. And it's far more amazing than we've realised. I'm sure it is.

I'm sure it's far more amazing than we have yet realised. And here is one of those incidents, those little statements which so underline the truth.

[34 : 46] His grace is utterly amazing. There is nothing in me that could give my Creator delight. There is everything in me that would cause him to turn away from me.

I feel the need of being revived. I am broken inwardly. But there's nothing in me that deserves God's mercy. And if he is looking at what's been happening in the past, then there's no hope for me.

God says, I've seen his ways. And you tremble in your spirit when he says that. I've seen his ways. And will heal him.

And will heal him. Not because he deserves it. Not because any single one of us could deserve it.

Not because anything we could ever do for the rest of our days would ever warrant such a blessing. It is God in his sovereignty and graciousness just comes into our lives like that.

[35 : 52] So utterly undeserving. You know, there have been times in my life when I felt so wretched before I've gone to preach. I've been saying in my heart, I can't possibly go to preach.

In this state, I can't go to preach. And in this state, God can't bless me. I deserve that I should just be left in utter confusion and darkness. I can't go. And really, it's only a sense of shame that drives me into the pulpit sometimes, if I were honest about it.

But the amazing thing is this, that again and again and again the Lord has come in spite of what I am, not because of what I am, in spite of what I am, and he has healed me.

He has taken away the things that would otherwise have totally ruined me and crushed me. He has taken away my sin. He has removed that sense of awful, crushing shame from my heart.

He has helped me. Can't you say something like that? I hope you can. This is amazing grace. And when you feel at your lowest and most bitterly undeserving, he says, I will heal him.

[37 : 09] I will lead him also. He has been going on forwardly, perversely, in the way of his heart.

You might expect the Lord to say, as he did in Hosea, Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone. But Ephraim shall say, what have I anymore to do with idols?

I will heal him. I will lead him also. He is going to come out of these ways. The constraining power and grace of his Lord is going to bring him out of these froward, perverse ways, and he is going to be led in the ways of righteousness.

Now I said you understand these verses in the light of the New Testament. How does God do that? How does God lead his people forth by the right way these days? In the Old Testament scriptures, in the wanderings of the children of Israel through the wilderness, it was the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

He led them forth by the right way, by a visible manifestation of his power. How does he do it now? He does it by his gracious spirit.

[38 : 28] The wonder here is that God gives to these most undeserving sinners his most gracious spirit. him and his most gracious spirit leads them along in the right way.

I will lead him also and restore comforts unto him. You know, to be contrite and humble is a good place to be in, but it's not a comfortable place to be in.

How could it be? conviction, repentance, they're very necessary. They are graciously good things to have working within, but they're not comfortable things.

They never have been comfortable things. I will restore comforts unto him. I will show him his pardon, his forgiveness, his relationship.

with me. I will show him my love. I will restore comforts to him. He will know that inner sense of spiritual consolation. I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.

[39 : 47] Those who weep with him, like he does. Those who unite with the sorrowing. Think of the grief stricken church, wherever you find one today.

a mourning church, mourning over its weakness, mourning with a sense of its need of God's reviving power.

God says, I'm coming. I'm coming to these mourners. I'm going to restore comforts to them. They're going to see things which will give them great joy. I create the fruit of the lips.

Peace, peace to him that is afar off and to him that is near, saith the Lord, and I will heal him. I know it goes beyond the end of the passage I said I'd speak from, but it reiterates the same thing, doesn't it?

God is giving that inner sense of peace after all the turmoil. A sense of relationship, peaceful relationship with the living God and the reassurance.

[40 : 56] peace. I have seen his ways and will heal him. I will heal him.

Well, it is amazing grace. What is the application really of these verses?

Well, first of all, it is a call to repent, a call to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, a call to recognize again and consider again the greatness of our God.

But it is also a very gracious, encouraging word of promise. This is what God will do. And you may plead this promise with him.

Believer, it is yours to take, as it were, to his feet and there to bow before him and say, Lord, this is written, this is true. Revive me.

[41 : 59] Restore comforts to me. To those who mourn with me. Lord, heal me. May God grant us an urgency in our prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Mine. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.