

September 1

Solomon writes that those who trust in their own intelligence are fools. That is not the walk of wisdom that brings a person safely through life. He says that one person sharpens the intelligence of others just as iron sharpens iron. Do we trust in our own intelligence? Do we think that we have figured out all the answers? Do we despise what other people think? Do we interact with them? Do we turn to the wisdom found in God's word for true wisdom?

Our society seems to value wealth. Solomon writes about two kinds of people who want to get rich. He says the greedy person stirs up strife. The miser who refuses to share what he has is in a hurry to get rich. He does not realize that times of loss are coming. When people get rich, Solomon says they have a lot of self-esteem. They think they did it by themselves. He says that an intelligent poor person sees through this act. This kind of pride will bring humiliation. On the other hand, he says the one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor. Jesus says something similar when he says that the poor in spirit are blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Solomon writes that true riches come to those who trust in the Lord. What kind of riches are we looking for: earthly or heavenly? Are we miserly and greedy? Those qualities seem to work for earthly riches, but they have a bitter sting. Is our spirit lowly and poor? There are blessings and honor that come from this. Where does our self-esteem come from? The earthly things we possess or our trust in the Lord?

Solomon writes that those who are righteous understand that the poor have rights. The wicked ignore those rights. Sometimes it is even a poor person who will oppress others who are poor. He says it is better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked so that one can get rich. One should help the poor. He says the one who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but the one who turns a blind eye to them will get curses. Are we people who care about the poor? Do we respect the rights they have as human beings? Do we oppose those who oppress them?

September 2

The last two chapters of Proverbs record the wise sayings of men other than Solomon. Agur says that God is a shield to those who take refuge in him and every word of God proves true. He warns that people should not add to his words; God may rebuke those who do, and they will be found to be liars. If God's words are true, we need to be diligent to understand them and how they apply to us. There is always a danger in misunderstanding writings of an ancient document, for we did not live and communicate in that time. There is also a danger in drawing implications from them and treating our reasonings like they are the words of God. Do we trust what God's word says? Do we try to understand it within its own context? Do we go beyond it and add our own ideas about it as though they came from God? Do we apply it to our lives? The words of God are meant to be lived out.

Agur says that he doesn't want to have falsehood and lying around him. He also doesn't want to be either too rich or too poor. If he is too rich, he may rely on his wealth and forget about God. If he is too poor, he might be tempted to steal and in this way profane God's name. Can we be content with what we have? Do we strive for wealth and forget about God? Do we help the poor so they will not be tempted to steal?

King Lemuel's mother warned him not to drink wine or strong drink. If rulers get drunk, they may forget the laws and pervert the rights of those who are afflicted. Rulers must speak out for the rights of the destitute who cannot speak for themselves. They must defend the rights of the poor and needy. Do we speak up for those whose rights are being denied? Do we support rulers who stand for justice for the oppressed?

The book of Proverbs ends with a testimony about a worthy wife. She does her husband good and not harm all her life. She is not idle but cares for her household. She teaches kindness to her family. Her children and husband praise her. Do the wives among us live in a worthy way? Do the husbands among us praise their wives?

September 3

The "Teacher" (usually understood to be King Solomon) writes in the book of Ecclesiastes that everything is vanity. He is speaking of life lived without God in focus. Generation replaces generation and the same things are repeated over and over. When he says that there is nothing new under the sun, one might respond that modern technology is new. It has made a difference in our world, but people are still the same. They still indulge themselves in the things that they think will make them happy, and things only bring temporary happiness. The Teacher says that he decided to find out if pleasure would bring happiness. He built houses and planted gardens and orchards. He had many servants and livestock. He gathered treasures of silver and gold and possessions. He acquired singers to provide music in his life. But when he thought about all the things that he had, he considered it all to be vanity. Do we spend our lives accumulating things, thinking that these things will bring us happiness? There is a brief enjoyment, and then we are off to gathering something new. The Teacher tried wisdom and knowledge, which he said was better than folly like light is better than darkness. But then he realized that both wise and fools suffer the same fate of death. He says that all his work will be left to someone else, and he doesn't know whether that heir will use it wisely or foolishly. He suggests that people should enjoy their food and drink and the work that they do. Do we enjoy what we do? Do we acquire wisdom and knowledge for their light? Do we share the light of Jesus with others?

The Teacher says there is a time for everything in life. There is a time to plant and a time to plow, a time to build and a time to tear down, a time to cry and a time to laugh, a time to embrace and a time to stop, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to keep silent and a time to speak. These are a few of the times he lists. He says that God has made everything suitable for its own time. But sometimes wickedness slips into the place of justice and the place of righteousness. God will bring the righteous and the wicked into judgment. Do we use the time God has given us for doing the right things? Do we know God will judge us?

September 4

The Teacher writes that toil and skill at work are driven by people's envy of what others do and have. People try to keep up with their friends, relatives, and neighbors in terms of acquisitions. The Teacher says this is a kind of vanity. Are we driven to work hard to have what we see other people have? Some people think that those who die with the most things are winners. Others think they are just dead. We can't take stuff with us beyond the grave. The Teacher says that having a handful with quiet is better than having two handfuls with a lot of toil. That is just chasing after wind. Where do we lay up our treasures? On earth, or in heaven? We lay them up in heaven by helping others.

The Teacher talks about the value of having a good friend. He says that two are better than one. If one falls down, the other can lift him up. In times of cold, two together can keep warm better than one alone. And two can withstand a threat better than just one. He says it is a vain thing for a person to live a solitary life. One will work and accumulate things, but to what purpose? The best kind of friend is a spouse. Two people can make a life together and help one another. Unfortunately, it seems like today that marriage is in trouble for a lot of people. When one partner doesn't get their way, that one will decide to go his or her own way. The benefit of two together is forgotten. Do we have a good friend to depend on? Is that friend our spouse? Do we work at our marriages to keep them together? That is God's intention.

The Teacher says that when one goes to the house of God, he or she should listen rather than bring sacrifices for sin. People who keep bringing sacrifices for their sins don't know how to stop doing evil. He says that one should be careful about vowing something to God. We must pay the vows we make right away. It is better not to vow than not to fulfill a vow. Do we apply this teaching to our marriage vows? Do we listen to what God wants us to do? Do we keep trying to make up for our sins that we continue to practice? Jesus has paid for our sins, but he also gives us his Spirit to help us put to death sinful practices.

September 5

The Teacher writes that the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting, which he also calls the house of mirth. One can hear the songs and laughter in a restaurant or bar, but these sounds are just escapes from the realities of life. The quietness of the funeral home reminds us that death is the end of life for everyone. There is wisdom in realizing that we are all going to die someday. That fact means that we should live our lives in a certain way to please God. The writer of the book of Hebrews says that it is appointed for a person to die, and then judgment comes after that. Are we living our lives with the end in sight? Are we ready for that judgment that will come after death? The Teacher writes that there is no one who is so righteous as to do good without sinning. That is why we need to put our trust in Jesus to be our Savior at the judgment. Are we putting our trust in Jesus to save us? Does that trust change the way we live?

The Teacher says that God has made people straightforward, but they have devised many schemes of crookedness. He says he has seen the wicked bring their sacrifices to the house of God. They go in and then come out again and boast in the city about the evil that they have done. The Teacher writes that the human heart is fully set to do evil because justice against evil deeds is not speedily executed. People think they can get away with doing wrong. The Teacher says it will not go well with them in the end. However, it will go well with those who fear God. Do we fear God and live like he wants us to? Or do we go to the house of God like religious people in pretence while all the time our hearts are planning some evil deed? God knows our hearts.

The Teacher writes that while people are alive, they should enjoy their food and drink and enjoy life with their spouse. Whatever their hands find to do, they should do it with all their might because there is no work or thought or knowledge after they die. However, he says the race is not to the swift, the battle to the strong, riches to the smart, nor favor to the skillful, but time and chance occur to all. Do we realize the truth of this?

September 6

The Teacher writes that a little folly will outweigh wisdom and honor. He says it is like the bad odor that dead flies in a perfumer's ointment produce. People tend to remember the bad things we do more than the good things. Those are the juicy bits of gossip that people like to share. Do we watch ourselves so that we avoid folly in our lives? Do we try to practice wisdom in everything we do?

The Teacher says to be careful at work because work carries its own dangers. The one who digs a pit may fall into it. The one who quarries stones may be hurt by them. The same is true for the one who splits logs. But work can be helped by the use of wisdom. If the ax head is dull, it takes more strength to use it. How much better to use wisdom and sharpen the blade. Do we use wisdom as we go about our daily activities? This is true of more than physical labor.

The Teacher says not to curse the king or rich people even in secret. Secrets have a way of being told. He said a bird of the air may carry your message to the one being cursed, and it will not go well with you. Do we watch what we say? Do we offer blessings instead of curses? The Teacher says that the things that we do will come back on us. When we help people, we will be rewarded later. He says to use our means in seven or eight ways. One never knows what will work and what will fail. Do we try to help people in different ways? Do we diversify?

The Teacher says that young people should rejoice in their youth and have a cheerful heart. They should follow their dreams and desires, but also remember that God will bring them into judgment for the things that they do, whether good or bad. He says to remember their Creator while they are young and healthy. The days will come when strength of body and health flee away. Although the Teacher writes a lot about the vain things of this life, he says that the end of the matter is this: to fear God and keep his commandments because that is the whole duty for every person. Do we fear God? Do we keep his commandments? It's our duty.

September 7

The Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon, is a long romantic love poem. It involved a dialogue between a man and his bride. When God created man and woman, he said that it is not good for man to be alone, so he created woman as a helper fit for him. When the woman was brought to the man, he excitedly said, "Bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." And so the drama of man finding woman, and vice versa, has been repeated throughout the generations. The poem uses many metaphors to describe how the two lovers feel about each other; some are clear to the modern reader, some are obscure as to exactly what is meant, and some are strange ("your neck is like a tower of David") and should not be used by aspiring young lovers today. But when the man calls his bride beautiful, the message is clear. He says there is no flaw in her. She sees herself as beautiful, perhaps as a result. Love always makes the beloved more beautiful than what an objective observer might say. She also sees him as quite handsome. They desire to be with each other, and search for one another when apart. She says that his kisses are better than wine. He says that she has ravished his heart, and her love is sweet, better than wine. He compares her fragrance to multiple flowers and herbs. She warns her friends that love should not happen before its time. She tells her lover to set her as a seal on his heart because love is as strong as death. It is like a fire that waters cannot quench. It is more valuable than all the wealth in one's house. Do we experience that kind of love? Do we compliment our spouses? Do we let them know of our desire for them? God created love between a man and a woman. It is meant to be a lifelong emotion. But sin can break that love. Do we guard our lives against love-breaking sin?

When the Magi, also called the wise men, visited the baby Jesus and his parents at their house in Bethlehem, they worshiped him and brought him valuable gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That baby grew up to become the Savior of the world, giving his life on the cross for us to take away our sins. Do we worship him? What gifts do we bring to him? Are they valuable? Do we offer him our lives?

September 8

The prophet Isaiah warned that the people of Israel had gone away from God. They had become a sinful nation, loaded down with iniquity. God said that he did not want their sacrifices and burnt offerings. He was not happy with the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. He hated their burning of incense and their various festivals, including their new moons and Sabbaths. He said through Isaiah that he could not stand their solemn assemblies while they practiced iniquity. He was not going to listen to their prayers because their hands were full of blood. He said they needed to cease to do evil and learn how to do good; they needed to seek justice and rescue the oppressed. Are we guilty of something similar? Are we exacting about religious ceremonies and getting everything right about church while our personal lives are a sinful mess? Will God be pleased with church attendance on Sundays when we forget about his will on weekdays? God commanded all those things that he hated, but he hated them because of their daily lives. Do our lives make him hate our songs at church?

John the Baptist also had a message of repentance. For him it was a heart issue, but more than a heart issue. When Pharisees and Sadducees came to him for baptism, he called on them to produce fruit worthy of repentance. He wanted their lives to show that they had in fact repented. When John was put in prison, Jesus began to preach the same repentance. Do we want to be saved by Jesus while we ignore his call to repent and change our lives?

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, each time he quoted from the sermon of Moses found in Deuteronomy. He had filled his mind with the Old Testament scriptures. They provided a guard against temptations to sin. Do we fill our minds with the scriptures, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament? Do we follow the example of Jesus? James writes that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. Jesus told Satan to leave, and after hearing the scriptures, the devil did leave him. Do we resist the devil and answer him with God's word, ordering him to leave?



September 9

God said through the prophet Isaiah that he was very upset with the Israelite people. They were living lives of sin and yet were haughty and proud. He was going to humble their pride. They worshiped idols instead of him. He was going to bring trouble on the people. Because of their sin they would be oppressing one another. Young people would be insolent to the older people, and people who lived base lives would insult those who were honorable. They were not ashamed of their sins and did not try to hide them. They were being extorted by their oppressors, and their creditors were ruling over them. Their leaders were misleading them and confusing them. Their women were haughty and acting wantonly. God was going to clean out all this sin using an invading army. It is easy to point the finger at the Israelites and say they were sinners, but in some ways this description fits our modern society as well. Do we think that God was upset with them but is pleased with us when we do the same kind of things? Are we ashamed of the sins that are practiced openly among us? Are we influenced by our society to approve and practice those sins ourselves? Are we proud of our sins?

Jesus said that peacemakers are blessed because they will be called sons of God. There are various kinds of peacemakers in the world. Some try to make peace between nations. Others work at making peace in church. Still others work at making peace within families. Are we peacemakers or peacebreakers? Do we try to do the things that make for peace? Do we help others who are having conflicts to solve them?

Jesus taught that the real intent of the law "You shall not murder" is more than stopping killing. It has to do with the things that lead to murder. He said that those who are angry are liable for judgment. He warned against calling people names such as "raca" (which means something like nit-wit) or "mōré" (the word for fool). Name calling is a kind of bullying that leads to anger and can lead to murder. The rule is stop it before it starts. Do we get angry? Do we call people names? Do we like to be called names by others? How do we want to be treated?

September 10

God pronounced woes on six different kinds of people in the book of Isaiah. One was on those who were greedy for land and houses, pushing out people from their possessions. A second was on those who loved their wine and strong drink at feasts with plenty of music. They loved to party but never thought about what God does and the things that he has made. A third was on those who used lies to hide their iniquities and sins. They challenged God to quickly punish them if he could. The fourth was on those who call things that are evil as good and things that are good as evil. The fifth was on those who think they are so smart at devising ways to get away with wrong. The final woe is on those who are great at drinking wine and strong drink and taking a bribe to acquit the guilty and cheat the innocent of their rights. Do we imagine that God no longer cares about such sins? In some ways although times have changed, people have not. Will people today escape punishment when they do these kinds of things? They didn't in Isaiah's world.

Isaiah had a vision of seeing God as a majestic king on a throne in his temple. He was surrounded by six-winged fiery beings who continually called out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." Isaiah's response to seeing this vision of God was one of fear. He said, "Woe is me," because he saw himself as a man of unclean lips in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Sometimes we sing that we want to see God. Perhaps we don't realize the fearful thing that we are singing. In Isaiah's vision one of the fiery beings brought a hot coal from the altar and touched his lips. He told Isaiah that God had taken away his guilt and sin. Then God asked who would go for him. Isaiah immediately volunteered, "Here am I; send me!" When we realize that Jesus has died to take away our guilt and sin, does that make us ready to volunteer to serve God?

Isaiah confronted King Ahaz while he was preparing to defend Jerusalem against the armies of Israel and Syria. He told Ahaz that God would protect Judah from them, but Ahaz was depending on his army and alliances. Do we look for political solutions instead of trusting God?

September 11

When Isaiah approached King Ahaz asking him to trust that God would protect Judah, he told Ahaz to ask God for a sign. Ahaz replied that he would not put the Lord to the test by doing so. Isaiah then told him that God would give him a sign: a maiden would conceive a son that would be named Immanuel (that is, God with us). Scholars argue about whether the predicted child was for Ahaz's time (perhaps Isaiah's own son) or a future child. However, Matthew understood the prophecy to refer to a maiden who was a virgin. He says that Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, was the Immanuel, the One who was God with us. His virgin birth shows that he was not an ordinary man. He was, of course, a man, having been born of a woman. But he was more than a man, the son of God. He was the one who died for us and then rose to life again. Do we believe in his virgin birth? Do we believe in his resurrection from the dead? Salvation is found in that faith.

Isaiah prophesied in a time of trouble. God warned him not to walk in the way of the people around him. He was not to call a conspiracy all that the people around him called a conspiracy. He was not to be afraid of what the people were afraid of. He was to fear the Lord and regard him as holy. Do we get caught up in the troubles of society? Do we listen to the talk of conspiracies that make us afraid? Or do we put our trust in God and live the holy way that he wants us to?

Isaiah prophesied that the time would come when the people of Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee would see a great light that would bring them joy. Matthew applies this to Jesus, who wandered around preaching throughout Galilee. He is the light that shines in the darkness of this sinful world. Do we walk in his light or stumble in the darkness?

Isaiah prophesied of a coming son who would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. That child was Jesus who was God in the flesh and brought peace with God into this world. Do we place our faith in the Prince of Peace?

September 12

God pronounced a woe through Isaiah on those who would use political power to write laws that oppress people. He said they rob the poor of their rights and steal from widows and orphans. He would make sure that they were punished for their oppression. Are we concerned about the oppression of those less fortunate in our society? What do we do to make sure they are not being oppressed by those in power?

God told Isaiah that he was using the country of Assyria as the rod of his anger to punish his people who had deserted him. However, the king of Assyria thought that his victories were only due to his own power. He said that by the strength of his hand and his own wisdom he had plundered the treasures of nations and removed their kings from their thrones. For him it was like finding eggs in a deserted bird nest; no bird tried to attack him. But God said that this was vain talk. It was like an ax or a saw boasting against the one who was using those tools. It was like a rod or a staff picking up the person carrying them. God said that when he was finished using Assyria as his rod, he would punish the boasting and pride of the king of Assyria and send a disease on his soldiers. Do we realize that God controls the leaders of nations? They think they are in charge of their own lives, but when they do wrong, God will punish them when the time is right.

Isaiah prophesied that a shoot would come out of the stump of Jesse, David's father. He said that a branch (Hebrew *natser*) would grow from his roots. Matthew makes a play on words to say that this refers to Jesus the Nazorean from the city of Nazareth. Isaiah says that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on him. That Spirit would give him wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord that he would delight in. He would judge not by appearances of things seen and heard, but he would judge with righteousness and equity. He would wear righteousness and faithfulness like a belt around his waist. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended on him, and he lived his life in the power of that Spirit. Do we live in the power of God's Spirit?

September 13

Even though in Isaiah's time Babylon was a part of the Assyrian empire and its king was in exile, Isaiah gave an oracle about the end of the future Babylonian empire. The oracle uses figurative language that one finds in the Old Testament but is sometimes misunderstood today. When the sun and the moon give no light, the king and queen have been deposed and maybe killed. When the light of the stars and constellations goes out, the children of the king have suffered the same fate. The oracle says that the Medes who will have no mercy will destroy the kingdom. That came to pass over one hundred fifty years later. It was a Median army in the Medo-Persian empire who captured the city of Babylon. God told Isaiah what was going to happen over fifteen decades before it came to pass. He knows the future as well as the past. Do we put our trust in the God who knows the future? He says that this world is going to come to an end when Jesus comes again. Do we believe him? Or do we live our lives like Jesus will never return?

Isaiah also gives a taunt against the king of Babylon. He says that the oppressor who ruled the nations in anger has ceased to be. He pictures the spirits of dead kings in the Hadean underworld (called Sheol in Hebrew) as rising up at the arrival of the king of Babylon. They say, "You have become as weak as we are." The king's pomp is gone, and his body is covered with maggots and worms. He had exalted himself above God, and figuratively speaking, had seen himself as ascending to heaven. The taunt calls him the Morning Star and says that now he has fallen from heaven since he is in the world of the dead. He was just a man, even though he shook up kingdoms and overthrew cities. Powerful leaders sometimes let their position go to their head. God will bring them down in the end. Do we put our trust in men who lead countries? Can those who cannot even save themselves be our saviors?

Jesus warned a man who wanted to follow him that he had no place to call home. And a man who wanted to wait to follow him after his father died was told to come now. Are we too quick or too slow to follow him?

September 14

God gave Isaiah prophecies against many of the countries that surrounded ancient Israel and Judah. He said that destruction was coming on the country of Moab. Moab had been an enemy of the Israelites although Ruth, the great-grandmother of David, was from Moab. When the destruction came on Moab, God told the Israelites to hide the Moab outcasts and not betray those who were fugitives. They were to allow the outcasts to settle among them and be a refuge from those who were trying to destroy them. Jesus teaches us that we must love our enemies. The command to help the fleeing Moabites is an example of how to love them. They were people created by God and needed help. Do we show love for foreigners who flee their country and need our help? Do we treat them how we would want to be treated?

God also gives Isaiah prophecies against the city of Damascus and the countries of Cush and Egypt. Just like Israel, they had turned to the worship of idols although they had the same Creator. God is called the God of Israel, but he is not just concerned with the Israelite people. There is only one God, and he created the people of all the earth. He expects them to worship him, not the work of their hands. Before the risen Jesus ascended to heaven, he told his followers to go into all the world and make disciples from all nations. People around the world are a concern to God. Are we concerned about the people of other countries like God is? Do we take the story of Jesus and the salvation that he brings to people around the world? If we don't go ourselves, do we support those who do go?

When Jesus traveled to the east side of the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gadarenes, he was met by two men who were oppressed by demons. He cast the demons out of the men and they went into a large herd of pigs nearby. The pigs were upset and rushed down the bank into the lake and drowned. The people of the village came out and asked Jesus to leave. They were more concerned about the loss of the value of the pigs than the men. What value do we place on the outcasts of society?

September 15

God sometimes had his prophets do some shocking things to act out what was going to happen to people. Such was the case when he had Isaiah walk around naked and barefoot for three years in a protest regarding what was going to happen to Egypt and Cush. People in Israel were depending on those two countries to use their military power to defend the country against the growing threat of the Assyrian empire. God's message through Isaiah was that those countries too were going to be taken naked and barefoot into captivity themselves. The Israelites had chosen diplomatic and military alliances for protection instead of repenting of their sins and trusting that God would save them. Where do we put our trust? Is it in our military might and diplomatic alliances? If so, will God treat us like he did Egypt and Cush when the Assyrians came? Do we trust God to save us if we turn in repentance to him?

Once more God gave Isaiah a prophecy about the fall of Babylon in the distant future. He said that forces from Media and Elam (countries in the north and south of the modern country of Iran, also known as Persia) would come against Babylon. The watchman on the wall would give the call that enemy forces were coming. The message that would go out was "Fallen, fallen is Babylon." That message is picked up in the book of Revelation to refer to Rome, another city that tried to rule the known world. Do we put our trust in God or in the forces of men? God controls them. What he decides will happen.

God warned through Isaiah that the city of Jerusalem was looking in the wrong place for protection. They were repairing the breaches in the city wall, building reservoirs of water, and tearing down houses for the stones to fortify the city wall. They were not looking to the God who had planned the attack long ago. Instead of weeping and mourning, shaving their heads, and putting on sackcloth in sorrow, they were killing their livestock to make a feast, eating meat and drinking wine, and saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Do we live for the present day only like they did? Or do we trust God for our future?

September 16

Sometimes in reading the prophets, we can get the idea that God is only interested in how the nations live as a society and not how individuals within those nations live. But God has Isaiah call out a royal official called Shebna who was using his position as master of the royal household to enrich himself. He was having a special tomb cut in the rock cliff as a memorial to his life, but God said he was a disgrace to his master's house, and so he was going to lose his position and be taken to a wide land to die there. His position and authority would be given to God's servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah. God cares about how we as individuals conduct our lives. He knows whether we are serving him or whether we disgrace ourselves by being self-serving in our jobs. How do we treat the responsibility that God has given us in our work? The apostle Paul writes that we should not do eye-service as men-pleasers, that is, look like we are working hard only when people are watching. Rather, we should be diligent in our work like we are working for Christ as our master. God always sees what we are doing. Do we realize that?

God told Isaiah to prophesy against the city of Tyre, a rich trading center on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Merchants from as far away as Tarshish in the western part of the sea and Egypt in the south would mourn when Tyre was destroyed. Her merchants were honored because of their wealth, but that would not keep the Chaldeans from besieging the city and destroying it. Even so, the city would be rebuilt after seventy years, and the future merchandise would benefit those who live in the presence of the Lord. Do we honor those who have great wealth? Or do we honor those who serve the Lord? Wealth only lasts for a lifetime. Jesus says we should lay up our treasures in heaven rather than on earth. There they cannot be destroyed. Thieves cannot steal them there. Where do we lay up our treasures?

Jesus taught that we should not fear those who can kill the body but can't kill the soul. He said that we should fear God who can throw both body and soul into hell. Who are we afraid of in this life? Do we fear God?



September 17

Isaiah writes that the Lord is his God. He will exalt him and praise his name because God has done wonderful things, things whose plans were formed of old, plans that are faithful and sure. Do we exalt and praise God? Do we think of the wonderful things that he has planned for us? Isaiah says that God is going to destroy the shroud that is over all people, the covering that is over all nations. That shroud and covering is death. He writes that God will swallow up death forever. He will wipe away the tears from all faces. When that happens, people will say, "We have waited for our God, so that he will save us." They will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Do we rejoice in the salvation that God has given us in Jesus? When he comes again, he will destroy death. The apostle Paul writes that death is the last enemy to be destroyed. But it is important to place our faith in Jesus while we live. We must not put it off until it is too late. Do we wait for God's salvation?

Isaiah foreshadows the coming resurrection from the dead that the New Testament makes clear. He writes that the dead shall live and their corpses shall rise. He says that those who dwell in the dust shall wake up and shout for joy. The earth will give birth to those who have been dead for a long time. The New Testament makes it clear that this will happen when Jesus comes again. It is proven by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul writes that Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. We can look forward to our own resurrection because of his. But that wonderful resurrection to glory is only for those who are in Christ. There is also a resurrection to punishment. Isaiah continues his statement when he says that God comes out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth is going to disclose the blood that has been shed on it. It will no longer cover over its slain. The apostle Peter writes something similar in his second letter. When this world comes to an end, the earth and the things in it will be found out. It will be a time for judgment when all will be revealed and justice will be done. Do we look forward to the resurrection? Do we realize that everything we do will be brought out into the open?

September 18

God is the God of salvation, but he is also the God of judgment. He told Isaiah to give a prophecy of judgment against the proud leaders, the priests, and the prophets who were so drunk with wine and strong drink that they erred in their visions and stumbled in giving judgment. They made fun of the message of Isaiah, saying that the things that he taught were just for little children who had been weaned. They said that he was always giving precept on top of precept and line in addition to line. His message was just here a little and there a little. If they had paid attention, his message was clear, a message of rest and repose for the weary. But because they didn't listen, God was going to speak to them with invaders who spoke in a foreign tongue. They were going to fall backward and be broken; they would be taken in a snare. They thought they had made a covenant with death by the lies that they told to avoid it. God was going to sweep away their lies and thus annul their covenant with death. He was going to lay a sure foundation stone that is a precious cornerstone. The New Testament picks up this passage to apply it to Jesus. He is the foundation of our faith; he is the cornerstone against which justice and righteousness are measured. Leaders would think that this is a strange deed and an alien work by God, but they will be destroyed. How do we perceive the message from God? Is it just a list of precepts and boring lines to us? Or does it bring rest and repose? Do we tell lies to hide our faults and sins? All these will be brought into the open in God's judgment. Do we see Jesus as our sure and firm foundation? Is he the cornerstone that we gauge our lives against? Or do we just see him as a strange deed and alien work by God?

Jesus taught that a fruit tree is considered good if it bears good fruit and unproductive if it bears rotten fruit. It is the same with people. When people are evil, they speak evil things; when they are good, they speak good things. What comes out of the mouth reflects what is abundant in the heart. On the day of judgment one will give account for the careless words one speaks. What kind of words do we speak? Is our speech filled with lies, obscenities, and insults? We will give account for such.

September 19

God gave Isaiah a prophecy against Jerusalem. He said the city was going to be besieged because of the arrogant sinners within it. But they would not listen to this prophecy. They were like people who had blinded themselves. They were like those who had become drunk. God had poured out a deep sleep on them because of their sins. The vision he sent to Isaiah was like the words of a sealed document. If it was given to someone who could read, that person would reply that it couldn't be read because it was sealed. If it was given to someone illiterate, that person would reply that he or she could not read. God said that these people drew near and honored him with mouth and lips, but their hearts were far away from him. Their worship was just following human commandments learned by rote. But their deeds were done in the dark trying to hide them from God. God wanted to know why the thing that was made would say of its Maker that he did not make it, why the thing that was formed would say that the One who formed it had no understanding. Are we sometimes like the people of Jerusalem? Are we spiritually blind or asleep? Does God's word become like a sealed document to us? Do we honor God with our words but fail to hold him close in our hearts? Do we say that the God who formed us doesn't really understand us? The Word of God became the man Jesus to really understand our situation. And he gave his life on the cross to draw us near to God. Do we draw near to him because of Jesus?

God said that the people had made plans to make a military alliance with Egypt, but they were not his plans. They had not consulted him. God told Isaiah to write down his words on a scroll so that they would be a witness forever against the sinful people. They were a rebellious people who did not want to hear the instructions of the Lord. They told the prophets not to prophesy words that are right, but prophesy smooth things that are illusions. They didn't want to hear about the Holy One of Israel. Do we consult God or make our own plans? Do we want to hear about God's instructions? Or do we want to hear smooth words that don't bother us? Do we want to hear about God or something else?

September 20

God told Isaiah about the kind of people that he planned to save. They were those who walked righteously and spoke uprightly. They despised gaining wealth by oppressing people. When offered a bribe, they would turn it down rather than accepting it. They refused to listen to stories about bloodshed and would not look at things that were evil. Are we the kind of people that God plans to save? Do we live our lives in a righteous way and speak the things that are right? Do we refuse to enrich ourselves with schemes that oppress people? Do we refuse to listen to and look at the things that are evil?

Jesus told a parable about a man who sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy sowed weeds in the same field. When the seed sprouted, his servants wanted to know where the weeds came from. He told them that an enemy had done this. They wanted to know whether they should pull up the weeds. He said to leave them until the harvest because in pulling them up, they might pull up the wheat as well since the roots had grown together. At the harvest time the reapers would gather the weeds and burn them, and then gather the wheat into the barn. When Jesus' disciples asked him about the meaning of the parable, he explained it like this: He is the one who sows good seed in his field, the world. The good seed are the sons of the kingdom, that is, his disciples, while the weeds are the sons of the evil one, the devil. They are those who decide to do the will of the devil rather than Jesus. The harvest time is the end of the world and the reapers are the angels. At that time Jesus will send his angels to gather those who practice lawlessness out of his kingdom and throw them into the furnace of fire, that is, hell. There will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth in pain there. The righteous will then shine as bright as the sun in the kingdom of the Father. While we are in this world, we need to make the decision of who we will follow. Will we do the will of Jesus and be in his kingdom? Or will we decide to follow the pathway of pleasure that the devil offers? The two grow up together and are intertwined like the roots of plants. Do we realize that how we live in this life determines our eternal destiny?

September 21

Almost seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, King Sennacherib of Assyria attacked the country of Judah led by King Hezekiah. The king of Assyria sent a royal official with a large army to Jerusalem. Three of Hezekiah's officials came out of the city to talk with him. He wanted Hezekiah to surrender and accused him of relying on Egypt for military support. He also accused Hezekiah of relying on the Lord, but said that would not benefit him. He argued that God would not help Hezekiah because he had removed the high places and altars around the country and told people to worship only at Jerusalem. In actuality that was what the Law of Moses said. The people were only to worship at one central place. That place had been at Shiloh until it was destroyed and then at Gibeon, but when the temple was built, it was moved to Jerusalem. Hezekiah had only done what the law said to do. The worship at high places around the country was left over from the ancient Canaanite religion. Are we sometimes guilty of trying to worship God like other people around us do instead of following what God's word says to do? Then the royal official of Assyria said that God had told him to come and destroy the land. That was not true, but it sounded spiritual. Do we sometimes listen to things that sound spiritual but do not actually come from God? Finally, the royal official shouted to the people in their language that they should not believe Hezekiah when he says to trust the Lord because none of the gods of the surrounding nations had been able to save their people. There are many religions in this world, but there is only one God, and he has revealed his will for us through Jesus Christ and his apostles. Other gods and other ways are not able to save. Do we think that all religions are equal? Our society seems to teach that. It is not what God's word says. Hezekiah tore his clothes in sorrow when he heard what the royal official said and put on sackcloth. He sent to the prophet Isaiah, asking him to pray to God for deliverance. God told Isaiah that he had heard the royal official revile him, so he was going to put a spirit in the king that would cause him to return home, and there he would be killed. God is in charge of the rulers of this world. Do we trust him to take care of us when things seem to be going bad?

September 22

When the king of Assyria heard that a Cushite army was coming against him, he sent a letter to Hezekiah saying not to trust that God would save him. Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord and spread the letter out before him and prayed to God for deliverance from the king of Assyria. God sent a message to Hezekiah by the prophet Isaiah. It said that the king of Assyria was mocking and reviling God, saying that by his own power he was defeating nations. But God said that he was the one who planned this long ago. God knew when the king sat down and got up; he knew his comings and goings and how the king raged against him. Because of this God was going to save the city of Jerusalem and send the king back to his homeland. And so God's message became true. God sent an angel who struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand soldiers in the camp of the Assyrians. With such a loss in his army, the king of Assyria returned to his homeland. Later two of his sons killed him. Do we realize that God knows everything about us? He knows when we sit down and get up again. People may say that God is powerless, but they can't escape his power. Do we believe in the power of God to change the events of this world? Do we, like Hezekiah, pray that God will intervene in the world?

While all these events were going on, Hezekiah became very ill. Isaiah came to him and told him that he was going to die. He turned his face to the wall and prayed to God on his sickbed, asking for more years of life. God told Isaiah to return to Hezekiah and tell him that he had heard his prayer and would grant him fifteen more years of life. Do we pray when we are sick? Do we believe that God will answer our prayers?

Many of Isaiah's prophecies are calls to repentance. But he also had words of comfort for the people. He prophesied that the time was coming when one would proclaim preparation for the way of the Lord. That message of making straight a highway for God was given seven hundred years later by John the Baptist. He was preparing for the coming of Jesus. Do we find comfort in the words about Jesus?

September 23

The prophet Isaiah says that people are like grass. They continue like the flowers that grow in a field. The grass withers; the flowers fade. In contrast, the word of God stands forever. Where do we put our trust? In people, or in the word of God? Where do we look for guidance?

Isaiah asks several rhetorical questions about the wisdom of God. The answer to all of them is no one. No one has given directions to the Spirit of the Lord. No one has instructed him as his counselor. He consulted no one for his enlightenment. No one taught him the path of justice. Isaiah contrasts the self-sufficiency of God with the futility of idols. A workman casts an idol and a goldsmith overlays it with gold. Or perhaps it is made out of mulberry wood that doesn't rot, and a skilled artisan fixes it so that it will not tip over. Perhaps we no longer look to images for our worship. But are there other things that we put in the place of God? Do we think that true knowledge comes only from science? Are we fascinated with technology? Do our inventions become our idols that receive our worship? Or do we worship the wealth that allows us to acquire all these new things? Are they our idols?

Isaiah says that the Lord is the everlasting God; he is the Creator of all the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is beyond searching out. People may become weary, but God is the one who gives power to the faint and powerless. Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength. Isaiah says they will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run without being weary; they will walk and not faint. Do we have the patience to wait for God's strength in times when we feel powerless? Do we ask him for help when we grow weary?

God challenges idols to tell about the past so that we can learn from it. He wants them to tell the future so we will know they are gods. He says they should do good or at least harm so we could fear them. But they do nothing and are nothing. What kind of idols do we put our trust in? Do they really help us at all? God is a help for all who truly trust him.

September 24

Isaiah prophecies about God's servant that he calls God's chosen. God says his soul delights in his chosen one. God puts his Spirit upon him and he will bring justice to the nations. God's servant does not cry out loudly. He is careful not to hurt people; that is described as not breaking a bruised reed or quenching a dimly burning wick. He doesn't grow faint as he establishes justice, and his teaching is desired by the people of the coastlands. The New Testament says that this passage in Isaiah is talking about Jesus. He is the Chosen One of God. The Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove at his baptism. Jesus himself says that he is gentle and lowly. He is admitted to be a great teacher. Do we see Jesus as the Chosen One of God? Do we look to him to be our teacher? He will teach us how to live.

Isaiah says that God who created the heavens and the earth and who gave breath and spirit to all the people on it has called his servant in righteousness. He has given his servant as a covenant to the people and as a light to the nations to open the eyes of the blind and free those in prison. Jesus is the one who brings light to the nations. But as the apostle Paul teaches about Jesus, he also describes himself as a light to the nations. Jesus continues his ministry of being a light to the nations by working through his church, which Paul describes as his body. Do we spread the good news about Jesus as a light to the nations? Do we prize and follow the new covenant that he has made with us, ratifying it by his death on the cross? The light that Jesus brings can heal the spiritually blind. Do we share the message of that light?

God says through Isaiah that his people are his witnesses and his chosen servant. He has chosen them to know and believe and understand that he alone is God. There was no god before him who formed him. There will not be any god after him. There is no savior except for him. He is the one who spoke and saved his people, not some false god. That is why his people are God's witnesses. Do we testify to what God has done in this world and in our lives as well? Is he our Savior?



September 25

God told the prophet Isaiah that he is the first and the last; there is no other god besides him. He shows his power in the fact that he can announce things that are going to happen in the future and they come to pass. False gods cannot do that. He says the people are his witnesses. They cannot tell of another god who can do so. He alone is a rock of refuge. He knows of none other. To prove his claim, he speaks of a time in the future when Babylon has destroyed Jerusalem. He says that Jerusalem will again be inhabited and the cities of Judah rebuilt. This will happen in the time of Cyrus (in Hebrew his name is Koresh). He calls the leader who will make this happen by name to prove his ability to control the future, even though Cyrus will not know him. He calls Cyrus his shepherd and his anointed. He will open doors for Cyrus to subdue nations and remove kings from power. This was fulfilled over one hundred and seventy years later when a young Persian royal named Cyrus became the first Persian king of the Medo-Persian empire. He issued a declaration that people held captive by the Babylonians could return to their native homes. The temple in Jerusalem was to be rebuilt. God had predicted this correctly to Isaiah to show that he was the only true God. When his word says that the time will come when he calls an end to this world and raises all the people to life and judges them all, do we believe him? Or does the time that has passed make us doubt that God can really control the future and do what he says? Will we be caught unaware when this happens?

Isaiah speaks of the folly of idolatry. A carpenter chooses a tree to make into an idol. He carefully carves it into human shape and worships it. With the rest of the wood from the tree, he makes a fire and warms himself. He bakes his bread on the coals from the fire. He has no sense to say, "Shall I worship something that I burned the rest of?" Truly, idolatry is folly. But the apostle Paul says that greed is a type of idolatry. We want something and acquire it, but then we put it aside when we want something newer. Do we have the sense to realize that we have rejected the old to acquire the new? Is this really different?

September 26

God told Isaiah that he alone is God. He is the Creator. He created the earth and the heavens. He made light and darkness as well. He created humans on the earth. His purpose was that there should be righteousness. When people strive with their Maker, it is like a clay vessel questioning the potter about how it is made. He did not create this world in chaos, and he should not be sought in chaos. He tells people what is right. But people make idols out of wood and pray to a god that cannot save them. God says that there is no other god besides him. He is the righteous God and a Savior. The day will come when every knee will bow before him and every tongue will swear by him. This language is applied in the New Testament to Jesus, who is the very Word of God in the flesh. People go their own way and make up their own rules about what is right, but the day will come when everyone will acknowledge that God alone has the authority to say what is right and what is wrong. Do we understand that the Creator has that authority? Do we look to him and his word to know the difference between right and wrong? Or do we too make up our own rules?

Isaiah mocks those who trust in idols. He predicts that the images of the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo will be loaded on beasts of burden and carried away. People spend a lot of gold and silver with a goldsmith to have him make a god of gold for them. They fall down and worship an image that they have to carry on their shoulders. They set it in its place and it just stands there. It cannot move. People cry out to it for help, but it cannot answer. There is image worship today around the world, but many modern societies have rejected both images and the true God. What do they put their trust in? Is it in their wealth? Is it in their government? Is it in their cleverness? Do these things really help in the day of disaster? Is there an answer from these things that are not images?

God through Isaiah says that the Babylonians were lovers of pleasure. That description fits many people today. Wealth is spent on personal enjoyment. Do we use our money to help ourselves or others?

September 27

God told Isaiah that he is the first and the last. He laid the foundation of the earth and spread out the heavens. He is the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. He teaches people how to succeed and leads them in the way that they should go. He wishes that the people of Israel had paid attention to his commandments. Then they would have been prosperous and successful and had many descendants. Do we realize that God's commandments give us the ability to succeed in what we do? Do we pay attention to his commandments? Do we worship him as our Redeemer? He has become that because of Jesus' death on the cross.

The prophet Isaiah says that the Lord called him before he was born. God named him while he was in his mother's womb. He made Isaiah's mouth like a sharp sword; Isaiah was made into a polished arrow. He was formed in the womb to be God's servant. His calling was to bring Israel back to God. Not only that, he was to be a light to the nations so that God's salvation could reach to the ends of the earth. How many children that God had a purpose for have been killed in the womb because they were unexpected and unwanted by their parents? If God recognized children while still in the womb, what right do we have to destroy them? Are we killing off God's servants? Will he hold us guiltless? Perhaps they too were called and named to be his servants.

The New Testament applies the language of a light to the nations as referring to Jesus. He is the light with no darkness. As he works with his people, they too become lights, taking his light to all the nations of the world. God told Isaiah that he answers his people in a time of favor; he helps them on a day of salvation. He has pity on his people and gives them food and water so that they neither hunger nor thirst. He makes a road for them to come to him from afar. He comforts his people and has compassion on their sufferings. The apostle Paul wrote that he too was a light to the nations as he spread the news about Jesus to other people. Do we take the news of God's salvation to the nations of the world? Do we offer them God's favor and comfort and compassion from suffering?

September 28

Through Isaiah God tells the people who know righteousness and have his teaching in their hearts not to be afraid or dismayed when others reproach or revile them. In the same way, Jesus says that those who are reproached and persecuted for his sake are blessed. They should rejoice because they have a great reward in heaven. How are we affected when people speak against us because of what we believe? Are we afraid or dismayed? Do we rejoice? We should take the blessing Jesus offers.

Isaiah writes that the feet of messengers who bring good news of peace are beautiful. Paul echoes this passage to apply it to those who bring the good news of peace with God that the message about Jesus teaches. Do we share that good news of peace with others? Do we have beautiful feet? Jesus died on the cross so all believers can have peace with God.

The fifty-second and fifty-third chapters of Isaiah contain one of the two clearest pictures of Christ's crucifixion in the Old Testament. They say that he will be lifted up high. People will be astonished at him because his appearance will be marred beyond human resemblance. But this startling news would go out to many nations, even affecting kings. The servant would not be one of great beauty or majesty in looks that would make people desire him. He would be despised and rejected by people; he would suffer sorrows and experience infirmity. People would reject him as being of no account. But he would bear our infirmities and carry our diseases. Even if we say he was afflicted and struck down by God, it was our transgressions and iniquities that he was wounded and crushed for. He took on the punishment that makes us whole; we are healed by his bruises. When we had gone astray, going our own way, God laid on him the iniquity that we all have. When he was oppressed and afflicted, he did not open his mouth in defense. He was silent like a sheep before its shearers. Justice was perverted when he was taken away, but he was struck down for our transgressions. The apostle Peter says this passage is talking about Jesus. Do we appreciate what he did for us on the cross? Do we share that story with others that he died for? They need to hear it.

September 29

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah has more to say about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus over seven hundred years before it happened. It says he would die with the wicked and his tomb would be with the rich. Jesus was crucified with two thieves and buried in the new tomb of a rich man. Isaiah continues to say that it was God's will to crush him with affliction and that his life was an offering for sin. However, out of his anguish he would see his offspring and prolong his days. This is a clear reference to the resurrection of Jesus; how else could he prolong his days after his death? We who believe in him are considered his offspring. God's servant, who is the righteous one, would make many people righteous and bear their iniquities. He would pour out himself to death and be numbered with the transgressors. In doing so, he would bear the sin of many people and make intercession for their transgressions. Do we realize the anguish that Jesus suffered on the cross to be an offering for our sin? Do we realize his shame in being considered a transgressor? Do we strive to live righteous lives because of the righteousness that his death has provided for us? If not, why not?

Isaiah writes that the barren woman with no children should sing and shout, for she would have more children than a married woman. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians that this passage is part of an allegory showing that there would be more Gentile followers of Jesus than Jewish ones. Israel is often called the bride and wife of God by the prophets with God their Maker as their husband. But God is the Creator of all humanity and interested in Gentiles as well as Jews. Jesus said to take the good news about him to all nations. Are we interested in doing what he commanded us to do? Or do we want to keep the gospel to ourselves?

Isaiah says to seek the Lord while he is near and can be found. His ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts; they are much higher. He sends out his word, and it will not return to him empty but will succeed and accomplish the purpose for which he sent it. Do we seek the Lord to find out his ways and thoughts? Do we look in his word to do so?

September 30

Isaiah prophesied that foreigners and eunuchs would be joined to the Lord. He said that eunuchs should not say that they are a dry tree because God would give them an everlasting name that was better than sons and daughters. Luke gives an account in the book of Acts of a eunuch from Ethiopia who became a follower of Jesus on his way back home. He is forever memorialized in the Bible. Isaiah also speaks of the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to love his name and be his servants. God would make them joyful in his house of prayer. His house would be called a house of prayer for all people. Jesus drove out the livestock merchants and moneychangers from the temple Court of the Gentiles. He quoted this verse from Isaiah and said that they were changing the house of prayer into a den of robbers. Isaiah said that God would gather others besides those already gathered. All of this became true when Jesus said to make disciples from all nations. Are we active in trying to reach out to people around the world so that they can serve God because of what Jesus has done to save us?

God says through Isaiah that he is the high and holy one who inhabits eternity; his name is Holy. He says that he not only dwells in a high and holy place but also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit. He will revive their spirits and hearts and will not continually accuse them. Are we contrite and humble in spirit? Do we realize that the high and holy God dwells with us if we are?

Isaiah says that God accuses the people who seek him and delight to know his ways while they also practice wickedness and oppression of people. When they fast, they humble themselves with bowed heads and lie down in sackcloth and ashes. At the same time, they quarrel and fight and oppress their workers. The fast God wants is to loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free, share food with the hungry, provide housing for the homeless poor, cover the ill-clothed, and not hide from one's relatives. Jesus says the same thing when he describes those he will welcome into eternity. What kind of fast do we practice?