

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's Sermon on 12/7/2020

"Living free under the rule of the King"

(Please read these notes whilst listening to the sermon audio file.)

Mini Series "Trusting God in the darkness:

Isaiah 51:17 - 52:12 Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.¹⁸ There is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne; there is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up.¹⁹ These two things have happened to you—who will console you?—devastation and destruction, famine and sword; who will comfort you? ²⁰ Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD the rebuke of your God. ²¹ Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine:²² Thus says your Lord, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: "Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more; ²³ and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, 'Bow down, that we may pass over'; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to pass over." **Ch 52:1** Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.² Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.³ For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money." ⁴ For thus says the Lord GOD: "My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. ⁵ Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised. ⁶ Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.⁹ Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and

all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. ¹¹ Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD. ¹² For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

We're looking at what it means to trust God in the darkness – those distressing times when trials come into our lives and we can't see how things will work out or how anything good can come out of it. We have seen that God prepares us for those trials by giving us his promises and we should **never doubt in the darkness what God has told us in the light**. Instead, **the proper response to God's promises is to pray for their fulfilment**.

Last week we saw that the exiles prayed urgent prayer out of desperation, because it seemed to them that God was asleep. They cried out to him to wake up and fulfil his promises for them. **Isaiah 51:17 shows us that it is not God who has been asleep, but Israel**. He calls them to wake up. When they do, the people discover that God has been working for them during their 70 years in exile, and is calling them to enter into the joy of all he has accomplished.

How is their experience relevant for us? We have seen how the biggest problem for the exiles was not being in Babylon but being out of fellowship with God because of their sinful failure to honour God as God. He used the exile to

- Convict them of their sin and lead them to repentance, bringing them back into fellowship with himself.

Isaiah is addressing the moral issue of Israel's sinfulness, and how God brings the people back into relationship with himself. This is why it is relevant for us. The whole of humanity is born in rebellion against God. As our creator he is:

- The King who has every right to rule over our lives
- The God who has every right to be worshipped, loved and obeyed

Yet we haven't acknowledged him as God. Instead we have:

- Worshipped ourselves
- Made more of the created world than the creator God

- Made up our own rules of how we want to live, ignoring his rules for our lives

No matter what century or society we are living in, Isaiah shows us that:

God is the King who reigns and works to bring us into the freedom of joyful submission to him.

This is **good news** as Isaiah goes on to show us in **Ch 52:7-9**, picturing a besieged city, with no resources left. While the people await an inevitable death, a watchman notices a lone figure in the distance. As he strains his eyes to see who it is, he realises that it is their king coming:

- to fight for them with all his power and might, and to destroy the enemies of his people
- to take up residence in the city and rule over the people, bringing peace, joy and salvation.

The watchman shouts out the good news – **Your God (and our God!) reigns** - and calls the citizens to come and see the return of the Lord to Zion. As they look in hope to see their King return, the people shout out his praises as we read in **Ch 52: 7-10**. The rule of God over us is **not** something to be feared. It is good news and brings great joy.

The rule of God has brought spiritual freedom from a spiritual enemy

Isaiah shows us three freedoms that God's people enjoy as they humble themselves and submit to his rule.

1. Freedom from wrath

God is a holy God, absolutely pure and righteous, hating all sin. He responds to it with a settled and righteous anger. Israel experienced this because of their sin, when God, not the Babylonians, put into their hands a cup of wrath so severe that no human intervention could help them as **Isaiah 51:18-20** shows.

Yet, while Israel slept, **vv21-23** show us that God was at work, taking the cup of wrath from their hands and putting it in the hands of their oppressors. When God commanded them to **wake up**, they discovered they were free from his righteous wrath.

We cannot help those who are experiencing God's displeasure as a result of their unrepentant lives. The cup of divine displeasure they are drinking is from the Lord's hand and only he can remove it. **If this is you, then please repent and cry out for mercy even today.** Those who repent discover God does take his displeasure away when:

- We feel deeply the weight of our sin
- Grieve that we have offended a holy God, and cry out to him for mercy (not just because we have been caught!)

It is a staggering gift of grace. Our sin is against an eternal God and deserves eternal wrath but he takes the cup of wrath away from those who submit to his rule over their lives.

How can he do that? Isaiah doesn't tell us yet, but he will..... soon.

2. Freedom from sin

In **Isaiah Ch52:1** God calls his people to awake for the second time and dress in the garments he has prepared for his people – the holy garments of the priest, because they have become a holy people. **v2** offers an invitation to those who have been humbled to the dust to come and sit with the King.

- While his people have slept, God has made them into a holy nation of priests and kings to rule with him. **vv3-4** tell us that just as he redeemed them out of Egypt, so now he redeems them from their sin.

Throughout the Bible, we see the narrative of how God continually redeems his people and in **v5** we see why:

- For 70 years the name of Yahweh was despised among the Babylonians, because, through their sin, Israel had brought disgrace on the name of God
- When we sin, living godless lives for the world to see, we too bring disgrace on his holy name.

God's jealousy for the honour of his name means he won't leave it to be despised and so:

- He redeems his people, buying them back from the enemies of sin and Satan and making them into a holy people
- He does it to put the glory of his salvation on display for the world to see

How does he do this? Isaiah doesn't tell us yet, but he will soon

3. Freedom from slavery

Vv11-12 Isaiah wants us to see the spiritual freedom God secures for his people – freedom from sin, Satan and death. Sin is so deeply ingrained in us that we can't stop sinning and Satan tempts us daily to disobey God by lying about his commands. God tells his people to depart from this and that he has set us free to obey him in his strength as he is present with us. He calls us to go on a pilgrimage of holiness where:

- We can walk away from sin, Satan and death as God himself walks before us to lead us and behind us to protect us
- We can leave past sins behind us and live the righteous life of those who have been redeemed into the kingly priesthood

How does he do this? Isaiah doesn't tell us yet but he willsoon

How can we have freedom from wrath, sin and slavery? It comes through the Servant who Isaiah will show us soon in **Ch 52:13** onwards. The Servant is the Lord Jesus Christ and we will see that through him:

- God removes his wrath from his people, pouring it on his own Son so that: there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus **(Romans 8:1)**
- God redeems us so that we become: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light **(1 Peter 2:9)**
- God calls us to walk in holiness with him and says to us: "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" **(1 Peter 2:11-12)**

Today ask yourself these questions:

- a) **Are you under the divine displeasure?** Christ died to take away your sin so come and confess your sin to God, trusting afresh in the blood of Christ to cleanse you and then enjoy freedom from wrath.
- b) **Are you struggling with guilt from the past?** Christ lived a righteous life on your behalf so put on the righteousness of Christ and rejoice in Christ who has qualified you to be raised up from the dust.
- c) **Are you tempted to go back to old sin?** Christ has purchased for you a new life, and promises to indwell you by his Spirit so **walk in the light of his presence and live for his glory.**