

The Glorious Redeemed City

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 May 2021

Preacher: Robbie Laidlaw

[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Katrina. Good morning, everyone. Nice to see you all. I am Robbie, one of the ministry trainees here at St. Silas. Isaiah chapter 60 is great, isn't it? I hope you got that from the reading there. And before we open it up, let me pray for us all. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the book of Isaiah. Thank you that we are able to read it every week together and learn from it. We ask that your spirit would move in our hearts, that you'd prepare us to learn from your word, that we might be more like Christ and love you more every day. We ask these things in your holy name, Father. Amen. I wonder what you hope for in your future. I'm sure if I were to ask a child, you'd get some great replies. If you asked me when I was a little kid what I wanted from my future, I'd have answered, I want to be James Bond.

And then maybe when I was eight or nine, the answer would have changed. I want to be an archaeologist. I have a very realistic friend who, since he was six years old, as long as I can remember, when he was asked what he wanted to do when he grew up, he always said he wanted to be a plumber.

Luckily for him, he's been able to live his dream. I, however, didn't make it to be an archaeologist. I wasn't good enough with a whip. What might you answer that question? If I were to ask you right now, what do you expect from the future?

Maybe you're an optimist. Maybe you'll think, oh, you know what? 20 years' time, everything will be under control. There'll be peace. No more war. We'll fix the economy by then. There'll be no more arguments. Global peace, global warming won't be a thing. We'll have handled all of our emissions.

It'll be great. If you think that, fantastic. I'm so glad you're an optimist. But I think when we look around the world, that isn't the case. We don't see what is happening in the world and think, it's going to get better. We see war everywhere. We see the economy in meltdown. In the past year, cancer diagnoses have been down because they've not been able to have tests, which means over the next few years, there are people with cancer who don't know it. COVID is a thing. Terrorist attacks are more and more likely. Abuse is rampant in every area of life. There's almost no end to the painful stories we hear on the news, and it's just hard to have hope that the future is going to be good.

[2 : 1 8] It's almost too hard to bear. It seems bleak. For many of us, it's an effort to make it through every day with these news stories piling on top of us more and more. The realist's view of the future is painful and hard to cope with. But thankfully, in Isaiah chapter 60, we're given God's view of the future.

And I hope you're struck by just how good that sounds. God, in this chapter, is giving us a teaser trailer for how good things are going to be. And when we see this view, our downcast hearts can be warmed.

The dismal future expectations we all hold on to can be thrown away when we realize how brilliant this future really is. And when we realize that this is what has been promised to all believers.

This is what we live for. Now, for those people who've been watching or coming in every week, we've been in our series in Isaiah chapter 55 or 56. And it might seem strange as we read chapter 60.

We might question how on earth we've gotten here. Things in the past five chapters of Isaiah have not been that good. Things have not been going well for Israel. The people are being called out for their lack of justice. They're being judged because they've turned away from God. There's hypocrisy and lies being outed by Isaiah. They're told to repent or face the consequences. So what on earth has happened that's taken the prophecy from so dark and bleak to this glorious vision of the future? Well, last week, Martin preached from Isaiah 59, and that chapter finishes with these verses. Let me read.

[3 : 56] The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins, declares the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them. My spirit who is on you will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children, on the lips of their descendants from this time on and forever, says the Lord. God has promised that His Redeemer will come, that His covenant promise will be fulfilled. So chapters 60 to 62 is a vision of what things will look like when all is redeemed. The people first reading this prophecy were not in a good place. They were just back from exile, living in a much depleted and downsized Jerusalem. A few months ago, we did a series in our evening service on Ezra and Amiah.

It's the same kind of time as that. Things were not well in Israel. It might help if you know the U.S. reasonably well to think of Israel as being similar to how Detroit is today. Detroit was a city that was known for its car manufacturing. It was huge in the 50s and 60s was its absolute peak. There were almost 2 million people living there in that time. But since then, it has declined massively. The factories have shut, and now living in a city for about 2 million people, there's maybe a third of that number.

Things aren't as they were in Detroit, and things aren't as they were in Jerusalem in our first reader's times. The peak for them was the reign of King Solomon. That was the absolute best. Nothing gets better than it did for those times. And both Jerusalem and Detroit are images of their former glory. If you go around Detroit, the place is massive. There's empty homes and entire suburbs where people have left. You can see what Detroit once was. And in Jerusalem, you could walk around the tumbling down walls with not enough people to guard them, the ruins of the temple, and you would see that something here was great, but it isn't any longer. It is to the broken city that God teaches, it sends this message. What he's doing in this chapter is describing what his perfectly redeemed city will look like in the future. He's picturing the new heavens as a city because the people of Jerusalem know what a city is, and they are in a very bad one. It's not a good place to live. And so he's using those images to make clear how great this Zion is going to be. And he's using metaphors because

Jerusalem, they would feel them really intently. We might not today. As we read this, we might be a bit confused because they're not relating to our world, but for Jerusalem in those times, it would be exactly what they know. And they probably thought, you know what, nothing is ever going to be like this. They would hear this like, no, look around us. Things cannot get that good. It's awful. It's never going to get better. But these metaphors are used to make them realize it will. And they are just metaphors. So when Jesus returns, it's unlikely that we're literally going to have the camels, you know, all over the place. The metaphors are given to present these spiritual truths in a way they understand. The new heavens are not going to be a physical city in the Middle East. They are going to be a new world completely brought by Christ's return. So you don't have to worry if you're allergic to camel hair. So what do we see in this perfect city? Why does it matter for us? Well, the first thing we're going to see is that all people are reunited. It's worth noting what life was like before, what life is like for us now. Verse 2 of our chapter says it was dark.

Darkness was over the whole earth, thick darkness over the people. Everyone is stumbling, trying to live their lives without knowing what's going on. They're realizing that life isn't what it was meant to be, but God's redeemed city will reflect the light of God. You see, like the sun rising over the sky, God's glory will come upon his people. It will cut through that darkness. When God fulfills his covenant, like he said he will at the end of chapter 9, all will be made right, and this world of darkness will be totally bright. But it's not just Israel who are going to see this light, you see.

[8 : 13] In verse 3 it says, nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. When God's glory shines properly, people will want to go to it. Verse 4, look with me, lift up your eyes, look about you, all assemble and come to you. Your sons come from afar and your daughters are carried on the hip. What Isaiah is telling us about is all nations of the world coming to Zion to be reunited around the glory of God. It uses a picture of a reunited family, but just before we get there, let's just think about how the nations saw God's light. Isaiah says, the light came to Israel, it came to God's people, but they reflected the light and it attracted all the nations.

If Israel didn't reflect the light, the nations can't see it. That's what we're called to do today in Matthew's gospel. We're called to be a light on a hill. Matthew chapter 5 verses 14 and 15, everyone's favorite song. We must live our lives in such a way that we reflect the light God has given us. We need to be mirrors so that everyone around us sees what God has given us. This light isn't something we can hold on to. We need to show the world because if we don't, they will not come.

If the light of God isn't reflected, no nations will come. God's glory rests on His people. It rests on us, and so through us, He will draw people to Himself if we're living life rightly.

But when that does happen, because we're promised it will, when all people are drawn towards the redeemed, glorious city, it's going to be emotional. You see, this is the picture of a family reunited.

At this point in history, Israel were scattered. The diaspora is the fancy word for it. It means the people of their nation were all over the world, split up, families torn apart after exile, some in Jerusalem, some elsewhere. They would know what it feels like to miss their family, and so this picture would be one that they just long for. And haven't we all felt that this past year?

[10 : 24] We've been told to distance ourselves from those we love, unable to hug our grandparents, unable to see the people in our family. Think back to that first lockdown, the picture of grandparents standing at windows and their children and grandchildren standing outside, so close yet so far, unable to hug, touch, embrace like family shoots, separated. And it's been that way for us for over a year. But the picture Isaiah uses is rower than that. It's of a child being ripped from the arms of their parents. Picture maybe more accurately the U.S. border in the past few years, the families being completely torn apart, children taken away and put into places they shouldn't be, and families sent back to their home country. The agony, the despair they feel at that, that isn't just, I can see them but can't hug them. It's so much deeper and raw. If you're a parent here, imagine the feeling of you realizing you're not going to see your child again for an unknown period of time because they've been taken from you. That's the level we're talking about in Isaiah.

And now picture the scene when they're reunited. Months, years later, this distance growing and the longing increasing with every passing day. But finally, the parent sees their child coming on the horizon with all the nations. Daughters being carried to their mothers, sons running to their dads, embracing, hugging. Picture the joy. What does Isaiah say in verse 5? Then you will look and be radiant. They will shine with joy. This isn't just a, oh good, nice to see you again. This is tears of joy, so much so that it permeates the entire place around them. This longing after so much separation, so much pain will be gone. That is the kind of rejoicing we will do in the city of Zion with all the nations because of the glory of God. Everything will be exactly as it is meant to be. The world will be reunited, one under God. Our longing is great, but there is at least much greater coming. Hold on, my friends. We will rejoice with all the nations soon. So the first thing we saw is that all people will be reunited. The second thing we see is that all circumstances will be reversed. I've already mentioned that Israel weren't in a great place. They were poor, they were in danger, they were subdued and separated from the people of their nation. This section, however, which is verses 10 to 16 or so of the chapter, show that all of that will be gone. God will reverse all their dark circumstances. Let me skip through, and I'm just going to read out some of the reversals we see in this chapter. Verse 10, foreigners and kings will build their wall instead of destroying it. Also in verse 10, God will show compassion after showing anger. Verse 11, gates will stand open rather than be shut. Verse 14, oppressors will bow down to them, and the people will go from being forsaken and hated to being the joy of all generations. Lots of this chapter, chapter 60 in general, brings to mind the reign of King Solomon, the son of King David. I've already mentioned that was the peak of Jerusalem. Nothing got better than they did in Solomon's time. Verse 13 gives us an image of that. It talks about the trees from Lebanon being brought to the city. The trees of Lebanon are like the best possible trees you could build with.

They were like super expensive, super fancy, and they only came from this one place. And so if you wanted to build something nice, you'd go to Lebanon and get your trees. The reign of King Solomon was so great that Lebanon, every three years, gave him a massive gift of trees because they knew that they were so much less and he was so much more. So they would give them gifts because that's how great time was then. And it's a similar picture in the first section that we kind of skimmed through. In verses 1 to 9, we see all of the nations coming and giving gifts to Israel because that's what they did in the time of Solomon. He ruled them and was so great they gave gifts to him to honor him. And that is what it's going to be like in Zion, in this heavenly redeemed city.

They're going to bring gifts for God. So this great reversal is going to take Israel from poverty to prosperity. God's going to reverse their fortunes. They're going to go from complete danger from those around them to absolute safety. That's what that verse, in verse 10 or verse 11, your gates will always stand open. They will never be shut day or night. They don't need gates because there's no danger around them. The only people coming towards them are those wanting to rejoice and glory in God. It will be completely safe and absolutely prosperous. The equivalent of Isaiah telling Israel this is like going to Detroit and saying, listen, everyone in Detroit, I know things are bad just now. I know things don't look good. But trust me, in the future, you are all going to live in mansions. You're all going to be out of poverty and rich. It's going to be safe. There'll be no gang violence, no drug deaths, no danger as you walk down the street at night.

Everything's going to be perfect. If you were to do that today to someone in Detroit, they would certainly have some words for you. And it's the same if you said that in Jerusalem in those times.

[15 : 48] What do you mean it's going to be safe? Look at us. We're a ruin. We're a wreck. We're in danger. No chance are we ever going to be like we once were. But once more, this is the image God uses to make them realize what it's going to look like. So they can illustrate the spiritual truth of how great the new heavens are going to be. And this whole section of great reversals is built around verse 12.

For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish. It will be utterly ruined. Verse 12 is the final fulfillment of what God promised Abraham way back in Genesis.

Chapter 12, verse 3, God promises Abraham that he would bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse. The world will be judged by how they treat God's people.

And this great reversal in Isaiah is where that promise meets its fulfillment. Those who oppress will bow. Those who forsake will be cursed. This reversal is the result of the great warrior we heard about in chapter 59 last week. Judgment needs to come so that Zion can exist.

But let's take heart in that reversal. We know the circumstances we face now will be completely reversed. to the parents among us. When you're rejected at the school gate by other parents for rejecting the views of the world on gender or sexuality and not teaching your children that. When you're made a pariah for your views and following Jesus' teaching. Well, your guaranteed future is not at the school gate. It's in Zion.

[17 : 28] For the student who's denied permission to speak a gospel because it's in Zion. And it will wash those pains away. Those who stand before you now telling you you are wrong will bow down before the glory of God and his right teaching. For the worker who is passed over in a promotion or maybe even demoted for their belief in Christ and talking about Jesus, you will sit in the city of Zion and you will be exactly where you are meant to be.

You will be at the right hand of God in Christ ruling the nations. For the student who's denied permission to speak a gospel because it restricts the freedom of other people.

You will stand in this redeemed city singing praises to our God forever. In this picture of Zion, the great reversal we see drives us on despite the roadblocks we face today.

Those roadblocks are nothing compared to what will come in the new Zion. And if these truths are true for us today in these situations in the UK, think how much more they mean to our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church.

Isolated, tortured, murdered for their belief in Jesus Christ. And it's for this reason they are willing to face it. They feel the hatred. They feel the oppression so much more intended than we might hear at the moment.

[18 : 42] But how much greater will the reversal be for those being persecuted? They choose to follow the great warrior redeemer right now because they know he will make oppressors bow before them.

And the city they are drew, the city they are promised is way more than they could ever be in now. This isn't a truth we can let slide. It's not a truth that when you leave these red doors, you forget about until you hear it again in what, 10 years when you're next to hear Isaiah preached.

This is the life preserver we all need when life gets too much. When you feel like you're drowning in the terror of the world around us, hold on to this passage. Hold on to this truth.

Because this promises that us, the church, will be the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. That's the promise we're given. Hold on to it.

Never let go. When we finally see this city come, when Christ returns and redeems the world, we will be vindicated in our faith. As verse 16 says, Then we will know that the Lord is our Savior.

[19 : 47] So we're going to see all nations reunited, all circumstances reversed, and finally we see in God's glorious redeemed city, all expectations will be exceeded.

Let me read from a part of the passage. Instead of bronze, I will bring you gold and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood, I will bring you bronze and iron in place of stones.

I will make peace your governor and well-being your ruler. No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders. But you will call your walls salvation and your gates praise.

The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you. For the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more. The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. The point is simple.

[20 : 49] When the Redeemer comes, everything will get better. Everything will get its upgrades, from bronze to gold, from iron to silver, from wood to bronze, and from stone to iron.

Everything is getting that bump up. More fancy, more expensive, straight up, better. Now this is an analogy of building supplies. If you've ever been to a student halls, you know what a cheap building looks like.

Designed to be easy and quick to build, not the best materials. That's not what Zion is going to look like. It's going to be beautifully designed, crafted with the very best you could possibly find.

Picture the mansions in Beverly Hills, those houses you always want to live in. Picture the great Georgian homes we see in period dramas. Well built, made to last. The Redeemer's upgrade isn't going to be like an iPhone upgrade.

We're not going to get, say, like, just under two years into our time in Zion, and then, you know, the light gets a bit dimmer, the battery lasts less time, and we need another upgrade again.

[21 : 56] That's not how these upgrades work. This will be forever. There's no need for anything better when the Lord has His way in His city. And it's not just going to be the building supplies that are upgraded.

Life within Zion will be upgraded. Verse 18, There will be no violence, no ruin or destruction in your border. Peace will be your governor, and well-being your ruler.

Everything about this city will be for the benefit of those inside. How opposite from what Israel are facing in their time is corruption, hypocrisy, constant worry of attack.

The redeemed Zion will have none of that. Their walls will be called salvation, and their gates praise. This entire city is built by the work of Christ.

The Redeemer Himself will name that city after the work He has done, salvation for His people. And you can't enter the salvation without walking through the gates of praise, giving Him exactly what He deserves.

[22 : 59] Not only will the buildings and the walls and then life inside be upgraded, but the sun and moon themselves will be upgraded from what we have now. No more will the sunset or the moon wane.

The Lord will be your everlasting light. The image that is so important, as I have said it twice in this chapter. We don't need a moon, we don't need a sun, because the Lord is our everlasting light.

His glory will give us everything we need. There's a real forever nature about all this, isn't there? The changes that come from God will never expire. They will never run out.

They will never change. That is something to hold on to. This perfect city will never fade. Everything else does.

The reign of King Solomon, the glory days of Israel ended. It didn't stop Israel wanting it, desiring it, dreaming after it. But here, what God is saying, He's using His metaphors to say that Zion will be like Solomon's Jerusalem, but better.

[24 : 02] And you see, to top that all off, this better city will never end. The sun sets on Solomon's Jerusalem, but the sun will never set on the Redeemer's Zion.

Don't we wish that our glory days never ended? Sitting on the uni fields, outside the lecture theater, ignoring whatever was going on inside, maybe a few pints, having a good time with our friends.

Maybe your glory days is when your kids were a bit younger, when they needed you a bit more, they wanted to spend time with you. You were able to take them in the garden, have fun for hours.

Maybe your glory days is the early days of your marriage. Maybe it's not easy anymore. Maybe every day of your marriage is a struggle and you just long for when it was easier. Maybe your spouse has died and maybe widowhood is something you know intimately and you long for the days when you had your partner by your side.

We wish those days of joy would last forever. They seem so good to us now, but they fade. The good news of Isaiah chapter 60 is that those things we long for are not our glory days.

[25 : 14] That time you long for is not the best era that you will ever have. All of these good times we long for only ever point forward. They are a taste of the glory days that are to come.

You see, the days of the redeemed city of Zion, that is your glory days. They will last forever. The sun will never set on them. The moon will not wane because the Lord is our everlasting light.

We just need to wait till they come. This is nostalgia is what we're talking about, longing for what is past and picturing as better. And as always, C.S. Lewis has a great quote on this.

So let me read. C.S. Lewis says, To get dragged down by our past false idols, to be distracted by what is yesterday, even when it points to a better tomorrow, well, it kills any hope of that, doesn't it?

I'm not saying don't remember your memories fondly, and I'm not saying never think of what has passed. What I'm saying is hold on to them tightly. Enjoy those memories.

[26 : 45] Appreciate and give thanks for what you've had. But rather than letting us turn back towards them, let these memories drive us forwards to the perfect Zion that is what we want.

Our memories are an echo of a tune we have not yet heard. They give us a taste of heaven, and we know the meal is coming. This perfect Zion is a picture that needs to permanently be in our minds.

You see, this city, this promise, is the reason we fight every day as Christians. We've been given a taste of heaven so we can better bear the temptations that we are faced. When we struggle against lust, porn, or sex, the reason we struggle to put ourselves first, all these temptations are fighting against what we're promised here.

But when we look at the perfect city to come, it spurs us on. It prepares us because we know that the fight now is worth the result that will come.

The devil's against us, and we know that. He wants us to forget this truth. He wants us to not see this every day. But Isaiah reminds us that perfect safety, perfect prosperity, the perfect reuniting of all nations is coming.

[28 : 06] That is what drives us on in our fights. You see, the reason Christians around the world don't distance themselves from God, even though it could cost them their lives, is because this is so much better than what we have now.

Brothers and sisters, the fight is hard. The world is against us. The devil is against us. But our God is for us. And he's given us Isaiah 60.

He's one of the tools in our fight so we can see what is promised and we can see what we have to gain. Stand firm. Do not lose hope in the gospel.

Do not move from the hope of the gospel. Put on the new clothing of Christ and fight the good fight. Run the rest of this race because, boy, is the reward worth it. Let me pray.

Let me pray. Father God, thank you for this vision in Isaiah. Thank you for the encouragement and comfort it gives us. Thank you that you love us enough to give us your words that we may continue walking towards the heavenly city.

[29 : 14] We ask for your help, for the confidence and boldness to be your light on earth. Help us to reflect your glory so that the nations can see you as their loving Father, that they might turn to you.

Father, help us to persevere through the challenges supporting one another until the time comes when the great reversal may happen. You are the God who loves to use the weak, so please, Lord, use us when we feel weak and useless.

Use us in the bringing of your kingdom. We long for this great reversal, Lord. May it come soon. Father, give us assurance to those of us who are facing the enemy constantly.

Let your word remind us that this battle will end and all will be perfect and it'll be better than we can ever imagine. Lord, broaden our minds. Let our understanding of the future be as great as the picture you've given us.

Let that strengthen us to fight the good fight, to finish the race we're on and to enter the gates of Zion in praise with all the nations, giving our lives as sacrifice for you.

[30 : 18] May the day come where we see Zion with our own eyes and not through Isaiah's. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.