

You Will be a Crown of Splendour

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Gordon, for reading that for us.

It'd be a big help if you could keep your Bibles open at Isaiah 62. If you're at home, if you could get hold of a Bible or look at BibleGateway.com, that'd be really helpful because it's important that we just look at this together and that you can check that what I'm saying is from the passage.

Let's ask for God's help as we turn to God's Word. Let's pray together. Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for your steadfast love, for your wisdom, for your goodness, for your compassion.

Give us ears to hear your Word, we pray, heads that can understand it and hearts that respond rightly to you. For we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, we've got three points. They'll come on the screen. Sorry we didn't get them in time for the sheet there. But the first one is God gives the deserted a new future.

[1 : 11] Isaiah, writing this message, was a prophet. And the first hearers for this last section of the book were around 550 BC, so about 550 years before Jesus came.

And in verse 4, you can see the state that they're in because he says in verse 4, no longer will they call you deserted or name your land desolate.

Why does he have to say that? Just imagine if people said that about you. If people looked at your life and they thought, and they knew that you followed the God of the Bible, and they said, you know what we should call them?

Deserted by God. Desolate. Deserted by God. These people were much smaller in number than there had been generations before. The city Jerusalem that they were based in was lying in ruins.

They'd had the experience of their crops taken away, their land taken away, and even people taken away. And it makes this chapter of real consolation for the people of God in any generation, whenever we might really feel that we're waiting for God to restore us because we look deserted.

[2 : 21] Maybe when the church is in decline. Maybe when life as a believer does not look prosperous compared to the people around us. And so, when it came to thinking, how do we hear from God this week as a church family?

This is a very sad week for us as we've lost Esther Brown, but what a great passage of Scripture to have come to in our series in Isaiah. I can't think of a better place we could be in God's Word than hearing words of consolation for a people who felt desolate.

So, for the people then, God says a future is coming for you from God if you hold on to His promises. It's a future where there'll be peace and security and prosperity.

What He's describing through the mouth of Isaiah, what the living God is describing, is the new creation that's still future for us now. But you see, He describes it in language that resonates deeply with the first hearers.

You see that? He's pointing them towards what we might call heaven that's future for them and is still future for us. But using language that's especially relevant for them.

[3 : 37] So, look at verses 8 and 9 where we see that, this description of the glorious new creation. And look at God swearing here. He's making an oath. He has nothing else to swear by that's greater than Him.

So, He swears by Himself, by His own arm. Never again, verse 8, will I give your grain as food for your enemies. And never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you've toiled.

But those who harvest it will eat it, and praise the Lord. And those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary. There's God speaking into their pain and into our pain, and holding up for us a future so bright that we long for it, and we trust Him for it today.

Sometimes people describe the Christian life as a journey, as being on the way somewhere. And as we walk along that road of faith, it can be hard to keep going on that way because lots of people around us are going on different ways in their life.

They're on different roads. And sometimes being on that road can feel like a slog. There's a writer, Dale Ralph Davis, who wrote a book called Slogging Along on the Paths of Righteousness.

[4 : 47] Sometimes we feel we're slogging along. But it's worth slogging along and keeping going when you're reminded where we're going, where the path leads. And did you notice verse 9?

It's not just that there'll be a place of security, though there will, not just a place of prosperity, though it will be, but actually the highlight is God Himself. So we will harvest what we sow, and we'll gather the grapes in and drink new wine together.

But he says, verse 9, in the courts of my sanctuary. In other words, we'll be in the presence of our good and generous God. We'll be with Him forever. So that's where we're going on the road of faith, and that's our first point.

God gives the deserted a new future. But what does God think of you while you're on the way? So that's our second point. God gives His people a new name.

And He says that in verse 2. In verse 1, He says that when He saves His people, it will shine out. Do you see that in verse 1? Her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.

[5 : 53] And look at verse 2. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory. All kings, the most powerful in the world, will look on the people of God vindicated and see it like a blazing torch.

And at the end of verse 2 there, you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. The Lord gives His people a new name.

And in the Bible, names are very important. I don't know if you know what your name means. Often our names are chosen for us because the name sounds nice. But sometimes names have very profound meanings.

When God promised to Abraham that through him, He would reverse the effects of sin in the world, of our fallenness and brokenness. And He would bring a people to be His people from every nation.

He renamed Abraham because it's the father of a multitude. That's what the name means. Or we might think on the other side of the coin, when you read the book Ruth in the Bible, we hear about Naomi, whose husband died, and her sons-in-law both die.

[7 : 04] And she returns to Bethlehem, where she's from, and the people say, is that Naomi? And she says, don't call me Naomi. Call me Marah, which means bitter, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

Well, Isaiah's first hearers might have said, don't call us Israel anymore. Call us desolate. Don't call this place Jerusalem. Call it deserted. And God says in verse 2, you'll be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

I'm going to give you a new name. And it will be an appropriate name for God's attitude towards his people. And we see that attitude in verse 3.

Have a look. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. So you picture a queen, picture our queen, wearing a crown, but actually taking off the crown and holding it in her hand to say, look at the crown.

It's magnificent, my crown. Don't look at me for a minute. Take a look at my pride and joy, my crown. This is how God sees the church.

[8 : 22] It's how God sees you and me. One of my favorite films is Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Some of you will not have been born when it was made, but there are two friends in the film who bunk off school.

And one of them, Cameron, is kind of being led astray by Ferris. And Ferris asks Cameron to show him his dad's immaculate sports car.

And they go into this garage where this sports car is. And Cameron says, the 1961 Ferrari 250 GT California, less than 100 were made.

My father spent three years restoring this car. It is his love. It is his passion. And Ferris says, it is his fault he didn't lock the garage. And they take it out.

Well, what is God's love and God's passion that he has an ambition to restore, that he is spending his days restoring and building? It's not the stars, the galaxies.

[9 : 24] It's his people. He's absolutely committed to building and restoring you and me. We, his people, are to be a crown of splendor in his hand so that he can say, look at them.

Look at them. And then we hear the new name that he bestows on us. Verse four, no longer will they call you deserted or name your land desolate, but you will be called Hepzibah and your land Beulah, for the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be married.

Hepzibah means my delight is in her. Beulah means married. And so these are the names that are fitting for God's people. And then the wedding imagery continues as he gives us the picture of a bride in verse five.

As a young man marries a young woman, so will your builder marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

We're to picture a guy on his wedding day who is absolutely made up. He's completely landed on his feet with the bride that he has. Maybe you, I don't know, if you've been to a wedding where you thought, this guy has really punched above his weight here.

[10 : 41] This guy is made up with delight at his bride. Such is God's delight over his church, his people, as he brings them to himself.

He made us, in verse five, he's the builder. So I think this is important. This is significant. We're not to think, oh, you know what? I'm completely useless.

I'm so terrible and wallow in self-pity and think, you know what? It's weird because I'm just so terribly useless, but thankfully, God loves me and he's gonna marry me anyway.

No, we're to think God loves me twice over. He is my builder. He is our builder. There's a corporate. It's corporate here. He is building us. He made us. He loves us.

And he loves us. He delights in us. We're his bride. We're not an accident. He planned for us. He designed us. He loves us. He'll take us to be with him.

[11 : 43] And when we picture the bridegroom who is over the moon to be marrying his bride, how does that make the bride feel? To be with a man who is so delighted that she is his bride.

That's how we're to feel when God holds this picture up to us. And it challenges us to ask whether we really believe this is God's attitude towards us.

Functionally, day to day, what do you think God thinks of you? For some of us, we might look at our own sin and feel very disappointed with ourselves. And then we transfer that feeling of disappointment in ourselves onto God and think, he must disapprove.

He must despair at me. I just haven't made any progress. He must shake his head in disappointment. Maybe you have an authority figure in your life who has never been happy, never been satisfied, a teacher or a parent even, a boss at work.

Well, folks, the one in authority over us, the Lord, his attitude towards us is delight. And delight is a lasting sense of satisfaction in the same direction.

[12 : 56] So that when God looks at us, he doesn't then start checking his phone because he's bored. He's not left wishing he'd chosen someone else, looking around, thinking, I wonder what they'd have been like if they'd been my people instead.

No, he set his love on you and me unconditionally. And he is eager for the day when he can hold us together before all the nations and say, this is my crown.

Look at its splendor. Look what I've made them to be. Look what they've become as I've loved them. And these promises, they're still future for us. The day of Jesus' return is described as this wedding day when the bride is beautifully adorned and dressed for her husband, Jesus Christ.

But the future breaks into the present because God is committed to that salvation plan for us already. Our future is secure if we continue in our faith.

So in a very real sense, we already have our new name from God. God already delights in us. He sees us already clothed in the righteous splendor that Jesus earned for us.

[14 : 06] He's given us the Holy Spirit that guarantees us that we are being transformed and we will be transformed. So we're free already from the penalty of our sin and we're free from its power so that we can live for God now.

So we've heard about what's at the end of the road of faith, God's promise that we'll be with him and flourish forever. And this is how God sees us as we continue on that road.

We're his pride and joy as he takes us there. So how should we then live? What does it look like to travel on the road of faith? We've heard God gives his people a new name.

Our third point is God gives the nations a new banner. So the Lord urges us to take heart, take to our own hearts what he thinks of us and where he's taking us.

And then he gives us a rallying cry. And the big idea is this, he calls us to live out our faith by living each day of your life as though these promises are true.

[15 : 12] You live each day of your life as though these promises are true. That's what it means to live by faith. And it will include at least two things in the passage here. The first is be a watchman.

Be a watchman or watch person if you like. Have a look at verses 6 and 7. Verse 6, I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem. They will never be silent, day or night.

And then he addresses them. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

So in the context, what's being prayed for here? It's the salvation that's being promised that will come like a blazing torch. It's that, it's thy kingdom will come. It's God.

You've made these promises. Keep them today. Would you bring them to fruition? Would you make your church, your people, the praise of the earth?

[16 : 14] And it's persistent prayer. Did you see that? Give yourselves no rest at the end of verse 6. We think, oh, it's central prayer meeting this week, isn't it?

Do you know what? I won't bother this week. I'll have a rest. Isaiah says, give yourselves no rest. You see that? Some days, my wife Kathy says to me, we should pray tonight.

And sometimes, to my shame, I've been known to think, can't we do that tomorrow? I just want to have a rest. But Isaiah says, give yourselves no rest in praying for God to keep his promises.

It's bold prayer and it's almost presumptuous. Look at verse 7. Give him no rest. So give yourself no rest. Give God no rest. Weigh his shoulders down. Come before him and hassle him.

Say day by day to the Lord, morning by morning, Father God, I've got these promises in your word. They're promises that your spirit gives to me today as a present word.

[17 : 22] And I lament that your salvation in me doesn't shine out. People might look at me and might even think you've forgotten us, your church. But I trust your promises, Heavenly Father, and I pray you will keep them soon.

Come soon, Lord Jesus. Give him no rest as we watch for his return. The Lord looks for us to give ourselves no rest and give him no rest.

That would be a key mark of walking on the way of righteousness today. Is it a mark of your life? Are there steps you could take to start praying this more?

Prayer is all kinds of things. Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God. Prayer is walking with God through your life, experiencing the awe and intimacy of knowing God.

But actually the prayer here is your kingdom come. Simple prayer. Jesus come soon. I'm praying that in a way that's waiting expectantly for God to keep his promises and bring his kingdom and raise the dead and give us resurrection bodies and bring us to the wedding banquet that he's promising is coming.

[18 : 36] And it will come because he raised Jesus to show us that it will come. And as well as prayer, we raise a banner. That's the second thing we do. We hoist up a flag.

That is we invite people to gather with us, to join us as waiting people, as loved people. Have a look at verse 10. He says, pass through, pass through the gates.

Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway. Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. I take it the first line there in verse 10, pass through, pass through the gates, is for us.

In other words, don't miss out yourself. Make sure you've passed through into the people of God. Are you someone who needs, who still has a decision to make to say, I want these promises to be my promises.

I'm going to trust them. I'm going to make sure I'm on the inside of these promises. But then there is a looking outward to others. An outward movement, verse 10, to raise a banner for the nations.

[19 : 43] Prepare the way for other people to come. Build up the highway. Remove the stones. That's get the road ready. A banner that draws in people of every nation to become the beneficiaries with us of these glorious promises.

To join us on the path of righteousness through our life. Guided by God's word. Guided by the spirit. In fellowship with the God who delights in us. And heading for the place where there's feasting and new wine in the sanctuary of God.

And it's an especially striking picture in Isaiah that a banner is raised for the nations because it happened once before in Isaiah. And in a setting that's much earlier than this.

In chapter 5, Isaiah pictured the Lord raising a banner for the nations. And it was a horrible picture because he gathered the nations for war in judgment. And so commonly in human history that's what flags are for, isn't it?

Banners are raised to gather people for tribalism and battle and bloodshed. And I was reading an article yesterday about Euro 2020 starting on Friday and it was saying how in some countries if you're a fan you're embarrassed to wave a flag because flag waving has become this kind of symbol of aggression and tribalism.

[21 : 04] But not here. Isaiah describes the times we now live in as a time when the banner is being raised. A banner is raised not to gather for war, not for aggression, but to gather people to say come and join a new community, God's new community that he's building, the people of God.

And we heard earlier in this series, in this section, in chapter 57 of Isaiah that the foreigner from any nation can come under that banner. That the eunuch, the sexually altered outsider is welcome to join us.

In chapter 61, that the poor and the blind and the captive are welcomed. In other words, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what you've done, the banner is lifted up in gracious invitation.

So what's on the banner that's made this transformation for the nations possible that means they can come up the highway and join the people of God? Well, the banner is Christ.

Have a look at verse 7. The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth, say to daughter Zion, that's the people of God, see, your Savior comes.

[22 : 19] See, his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. So we speak, perhaps one person by one person, perhaps in quite a broken, unimpressive way, we speak about Jesus to the people around us.

But through that, the Lord proclaims to the ends of the earth that the Savior is coming. See, your Savior comes to you. And what a Savior he is.

He's the Savior of chapter 53 of Isaiah, the one who took our place on the cross. And we sung, we sung an old hymn this morning at the 9 a.m. service, picturing Jesus on his return and saying, crown him, crown him, king of kings.

And we're going to sing later at this service, crown him. But in Isaiah 53, Isaiah foretold the day when Jesus was crowned in derision as they placed the crown of thorns on his head and made him bleed.

And here we see that the reason Jesus was willing to wear that crown of thorns was so that one day he could hold us up as his crown, his crown of splendor, and say, these are my people.

[23 : 35] I've won them. He was given a name, the man of sorrows in Isaiah 53. But he took that name, man of sorrows, so that we could be given a new name, Hepzibah.

God saying to us, my delight is in her. Esther Brown is with him now, and if we continue in our faith, we'll see him too.

I don't know whether you've thought about this before. There's a line in Hebrews, it says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. And we might think of the heavenly father, our heavenly father now, rewarding Jesus in some way in heaven.

But we see here in Isaiah 62 that the reward will be us. That's the joy set before him for which he endured the cross, that he was redeeming us so that we could be his bride.

So we raise a banner, and we look out at the people around us in expectation. Do you see the expectation of verse 10? Prepare the way for the people, build up a highway.

[24 : 44] Now why do you build a highway? Because you're expecting a lot of people to come. A great multitude is coming to know the living God. I don't know if you remember that there's a phrase, originally from a classic film, Field of Dreams, although I knew it from a less classic film, Wayne's World.

But they had this phrase, if you build it, they will come. It was a phrase, if you build it, they will come. And I remember helping with a youth camp where numbers got so low we almost packed in. And we decided to just go for it and step out and make it bigger.

And one of the guys on the committee said, if we build it, they will come. And we had no promise from God about that, although people did come, remarkably. But there is that expectation idea here in verse 10, isn't there, of build the highway, get out there.

Not thinking, I don't know why I'm even telling you about Jesus because nobody is interested in this. But rather to think, I will tell people because there's a banner being raised and we're to build a highway to welcome people from the nations.

And clearly, Jesus warns at the same time that as we do that, people will hate us. He said, if the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me too. We can expect that we might be reviled and slandered and people might say all kinds of evil things against us.

[26 : 03] At the same time, he says, build up the highway, remove the stones because there's a great multitude who God is urging to come in and join his people.

Maybe some of you today feel that call yourself to come home to God. For those of us who are already God's people, we're to clear the path, to make space for the multitude. What might that mean for you in your own life?

Could it mean that you would spend a week of your summer holiday leading on a youth camp because you take a step of faith of thinking, you know what, I think Jesus saves teenagers. I think he saves them.

Or maybe we think about church planting. You know, we might think, you know, that could go horribly wrong, couldn't it? We could invest and recruit a church planter and we could send a launch team and we could send them out to go to a place in Glasgow to plant a new church and it might be that nobody in that community wants to join that church.

Nobody wants to hear about Jesus. Well, it could be. It could be that. But verse 10 calls us to reach out with expectation that God is at work among people around us.

[27 : 18] Maybe for you and me personally it might be about how we feel just sharing with a friend that you're a Christian. Could we be stirred to do that with expectation, eyes looking at God and what he will do, trusting that Jesus saves people in Scotland today.

So be a watchman, pray thy kingdom come and raise a banner, raise a flag, invite others to come to Christ. And we live obedient lives.

That happens in verse 12. Just have a look at the end there. He says, they will be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord. And the holy people there is a climax. The call is that when people look at us we would be marked out as distinctive, as living God's way, lives of love for him and for others.

And we won't truly be changed to live like that if fundamentally we still believe, you know, in life I've got to make a name for myself. That's what my life's about, making a name for myself.

And we won't be changed if functionally we still believe, you know, I've got to obey God to try and prize blessing out of his hands. No, we become holy people, transformed, when the message that reigns in our hearts is, God made me, he's my builder, and he's given me a new name, that I, along with his people, are his crown, his bride, his Hepzibah, his sheer delight.

[28 : 52] When that is in our hearts, we can be his watchman, praying to him, and we can raise his banner, speaking of him, and we can be his holy people, living for him.

Let's have a moment of quiet, and then I'll lead us in a prayer. Lord Jesus, we praise you that you wore a crown of thorns, that we could be your crown of splendor.

Amen. We pray you will come soon, and we pray that day by day you would help us to continue in our faith, looking to that day when we see you take great delight in us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Help us to raise your banner for the nations.

For your namesake. Amen.