

The Coming Glory - Transformed by Light

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- [0 : 00] Please take a seat. It's good to see you all. We are going to be flipping a bit between the two passages tonight, and there is a handout.
- So my suggestion is perhaps put the newsletter in John and then put your thumb in Isaiah, or on the page of chapter 60. Let me pray for us before we start.
- Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for preserving this prophecy in Isaiah 60, for us to savor. And we pray that even as we look through it tonight, may its full glory and its full impact come into our lives and come into our hearts.
- We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I want you to imagine yourself at a play. Perhaps close your eyes if you want to, to imagine.
- The lights go off, the curtain rises, and the stage is pitched black. Suddenly the lights go on, just a single spotlight, very bright and powerful, and it's shining on a solitary figure.
- [1 : 18] She's sitting on the ground on a bare stage. Her dress is torn. She's barefooted, and she appears homeless.
- Slowly she looks up to the light, and as she does, she rises toward it. The sadness in her eyes slowly disappears, replaced by a smile on her face and a sparkle in her eyes.
- But her gaze remains fixed on the light. Then out of the darkness, from the rest of the stage, other people start appearing.
- And they bring gifts to leave at her feet. And some bring floral bouquets. Someone puts a new dress on her, a beautiful gown, the type AFL wives wear to the brown though.
- Next, a tiara is put on her, full of jewels, then a pearl necklace, then diamond earrings, and rings, and bracelets.
- [2 : 25] And still, the people keep coming. More gifts as they kneel at her feet, and kiss her hands as you do a queen. And then finally, as the spotlight widens, we see the stage full of gifts, and spilling over its edge.
- It's a sea of flowers and gifts and treasures. A bit like it was at Buckingham Palace, the week that Princess Diana died. Well friends, that's the kind of image that I get when I read Isaiah 60.
- Except the object in question is not a lady, but a city. The city of the Lord, as it says in verse 14. Now, cities are a funny thing, aren't they?
- They're inanimate, but yet we sort of treat them like they are people. So we have phrases like, the heart of the city is throbbing with activity. Or the city has lost its soul.
- And we recognize that different cities have different identities. So Melbourne, thankfully, is not like Sydney. And the Bible treats cities in a very similar way.
- [3 : 40] And here, we have got God speaking personally to Jerusalem, or Zion, as she's known by her other name. And he's telling her of her promised transformation.
- In particular, God is telling her that he's going to set her apart from the world. And as we look at the passage tonight, we see that he's going to call her to three things, three specific things.

And they're in your outlines. The first is found in verses 1 to 3. God will make his light shine on her because he calls her to be a reflection of his glory.

It's amazing because all through Isaiah, we've been told that God does not share his glory. So, if you remember two weeks ago in Isaiah chapter 42 and verse 8, the Lord said, I am the Lord.

That is my name. My glory, I will not yield to another, nor praise to idols. And yet, now we have God sharing his glory.

[4 : 41] He's willing to share his glory after all. Zion alone will be a city that shares God's light. Notice in verse 2 that the rest of the earth is still covered in darkness.

For a city that has been disobedient, this is an amazing turnaround. So, her shame is gone. The Lord says in verse 1, Arise and shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples. But the Lord rises upon you and the glory appears over you. She alone has the light of God, his truth, his righteousness, his glory.

And she alone reflects God's glory. As a result, the nations come to her. The nations will come to your light and the kings to the brightness of your dawn.

They come not because of her greatness, but because of God's glory to find God and to know him. And so this is something that Zion mustn't forget. Her glory is not her own.

[5 : 51] She shines only because God's glory, like the dawn, the sun dawning on her, shines on her. So she is to be a reflection of God's glory.

That's her first calling. But second, God is calling her to be the place where people will worship him. She will be a magnet for the worshippers of God.

And they are to come in order to worship him. You see how in verses 4 to 14 that at the end of every stanza, there is a reference to worship.

So in verse 6, all from Sheba will come bearing gold and incense. Why? In order to proclaim the praise of the Lord. In verse 7, the flocks of Kedar and the rams of Neboeth will be accepted as offerings on my altar and I will adorn my glorious temple.

And notice that the gifts, by the way, that they bring all relate to offerings or sacrifices for worship. Further on in verse 9, children come with silver and gold to honor the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel.

[7 : 02] Then again in verse 13, where the trees will be used to adorn God's sanctuary and glorify the place of his feet. That is the temple, which is God's footstool.

Now Jerusalem used to have that role in the days of David. God had put his temple there and the people of Israel would come from afar at Passover and during the major feasts to make sacrifices and to worship God.

And so now again, it will be. And in verse 4, Isaiah says, Zion's sons and daughters come, many from afar, possibly returning from exile, and even the very young are coming.

That's the reference to being carried on their mother's hips. Imagine the scene at the airport arrivals hall where parents greet their long-absent children.

That's how Jerusalem will be. Verse 5, then you will look and be radiant. Your heart will throb and swell with joy, bursting with happiness to greet her children.

[8 : 08] But look, it's not just the people of Israel that come. For already, we've seen in verse 3 that the nations and the kings will come, the strong and the mighty, in other words, in the world.

In verse 5, they come with treasures, bringing the wealth of the seas and the riches of the nations. And as the verses go, we see more detail of what they will bring. So camels from Midian, verse 6, the ships of the sand, so-called, with gold and incense, flocks from Kera, as we've seen before in verse 7, silver and gold in verse 9, and then the mighty trees of Canaan, the glory of Lebanon, verse 13, the juniper, the fir, and the cypress.

Now, we're not sure whether they're going to bring timber cut or whether these trees are going to be transplanted. But whatever it is, these are the symbols of the nations around Israel, the symbols of their pride.

And you can even see it today, can't you, in the flag that Lebanon has. It's a flag with a tree in it. Now, many of these places will not be familiar to us, but the idea is that they're all dotted around her and they're coming from everywhere, including by sea from the west, bringing gifts from even further away.

And we're meant to see in this a great reversal. That is, nations that used to come to destroy Jerusalem, steal her treasures, and take her best into exile, are now doing the exact opposite.

[9 : 40] So in verse 10, the foreigners will rebuild your walls and their kings will serve you. In verse 11, people bring you the wealth and the nations and their kings are led, as it were, in triumphal procession.

that is, as though Jerusalem has won the victory and the kings are being led in procession back to her city. And then verse 14, the children of your oppressors will come bowing before you.

All who despise you, those who are your enemies, will now bow down at your feet and will call you the city of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. And so they're not only worshipping God, they're also bowing down at Zion's feet.

They are honouring her because she's reflecting God's glory. God is happy for Zion to be honoured also because her glory serves to magnify his.

So God firstly calls Zion to reflect his glory, verse 1 to 3. Then he calls her to draw people to worship him, verses 4 to 14. And thirdly, in verses 15 to 18, God calls Jerusalem to be a refuge for salvation because when the people come, what they find is salvation.

[11 : 01] They find a place of peace, safety, and justice. And again, we're meant to see the contrast to the past. In years gone by, it was the actual residents of Jerusalem that were fleeing from her because it was no longer safe.

Foreigners that came would shun her because there was no point in staying there. it's a bit like one of those towns in those Hollywood movies, those in the Wild West, those John Wayne movies, you know, dusty and dirty.

All the windows are always shuttered up and there's no one on the main street. Well, that was how it was with Jerusalem. Verse 15, And although you have been forsaken and hated with no one traveling through, now I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations.

You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. So this is going to be a permanent place of salvation. She will be a joy for all generations, not just for a season.

God will establish her forever and her wealth and provision, there will be no end to that. The wealth of the nations will just keep coming and coming into her.

[12 : 20] And such is that transformation that she will see and then not be able to deny that it is only the Lord that is able to do this. It has taken a mighty God to achieve her transformation.

And so it says, Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. And everyone will be able to tell that this is a city that God has rebuilt.

How? Because it says that 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.

It's the sort of exact opposite to how our home renovations go. You know how we go to those home shows and you start off with such grand plans? Gold taps and door handles, the best appliances, and then you see the price tags and then you have to settle for something less.

Well, not so with Jerusalem. The gold and the silver adds to her shine but it also indicates the permanence of the transformation. But her true splendor actually lies in her character itself.

[13 : 33] So we read further, 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. You will call your walls salvation and your gates praise.

It is the quality of life she offers that is true gold and true silver. Real peace, real security, and real prosperity. glory. And so it is that this entire vision ends with God again reminding Zion of her true source of blessing, God.

The sun will no longer be your light by day nor will the brightness of the moon shine on, verse 19, 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. Then all your people will be righteous and they will possess the land forever.

They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands for the display of my splendor. The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest, a mighty nation. This is glory that money cannot buy because it is God's work and God's work alone.

[14 : 52] Only he can give everlasting peace and make her people righteous. Only God can give worth to each person.

Now, no city in this world can lay claim to this kind of glory. Not New York or London or Paris. Not even Melbourne, the most livable city in the world.

Because all our cities have a dark and seedy side, don't they? Melbourne has its strip clubs on King Street and we have areas of, you know, great poverty, high unemployment, drugs and crime.

And even in our normal homes, in our normal suburbs, behind closed doors, people suffer. You know, things like domestic violence, child abuse. So the question is, where is God going to build a city like this?

Jerusalem herself never reached such heights. But as we've seen before and right at the end of this chapter, this is an ironclad promise from God.

[16 : 01] He says, I am the Lord, verse 22, in its time I will do it swiftly. So the question is, when then is this time? Has it happened and we've missed it?

Or is it still to come? Now it's traditional in some parts of the church to read this passage, Isaiah 60, at Epiphany.

That is, on the 6th of January, which is about 12 days after Christmas. The reason being it is that it coincides with the day that Jesus was presented at the temple. Where, if we read the Gospel of Luke, Simeon prayed this prayer, My eyes have seen your salvation, which we have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

So, the answer then is Jesus is the light of Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 1. Just as the servant in Isaiah 42 was also the light to the Gentiles.

And that's the first way that Isaiah 60 is fulfilled. Jesus is the light that comes and he's the one that shines on Zion. And we see that, don't we, in John's prologue.

[17 : 13] And here's where you can turn to John chapter 1, page 1062. In verse 4 and 5, it reads, In him was life and the life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Then again, in verse 9, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. And John goes on in the rest of the gospel to tell us what to do with this light.

So, in John chapter 3 and verse 19, and I think we've got the verse up there, this is the verdict. Light has come into the world but people love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Then again, in John chapter 8 and verse 12, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. So, here in John, as in Isaiah 60, we are to respond to the light by coming to it, to coming to Jesus.

[18 : 25] Friends, the fact is none of us have any light of our own. If we shine, it's only because Jesus' light shines on us.

So often, we're tempted, aren't we, to chase our own glory, to try and make a name for ourselves, to seek the praise of others. Now, in one sense, there's nothing wrong with wanting to be great but the way to do that is to reflect God's glory, to reflect Jesus' glory and to live our lives with the light of Jesus.

everything else is just empty glory and there is only darkness when we step away from Jesus and no amount of human praise or human achievement can overcome that.

Only when God's truth shines in us, when his grace is clearly seen in our lives, only as we keep coming to Jesus will we have glory to reflect, his glory to reflect.

Now, there's another part of the tradition in relation to the epiphany which says that Isaiah 60 is read to signify the visit of the wise men.

[19 : 36] That is, them bringing gifts to Jesus and bowing at his feet just as it says in Isaiah 60 and verse 6 and 14. And so, with that view, Jesus also fulfills Isaiah 60 as God's temple, the place where people are drawn to worship God.

And if you go back to John's prologue, it's also there in verse 12. So John says, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So the word dwelling is the same word for tabernacle, the meeting place between God and Israel. And in John 2, the next chapter, when Jesus challenged the Jews and said, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days, he wasn't talking about the physical temple but he was talking about his own body and his death.

And still later in John 12 and verse 31, which we have up here, he says, now is the time for judgment on this world, now the prince of this world will be driven out and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. Jesus had to be lifted up in death in order for people to come to him and he is the temple, the sacrifice around which the people of God are built.

[21 : 08] Yes, Jesus had to strike Jesus in anger just like Zion was in verse 10 of chapter 60 but not as it was with Jerusalem because of his own sin for he had none but because of ours.

He too was forsaken and hated just like Jerusalem was in verse 15 but again he was suffering for our shame not his own. For it is on that very cross that Jesus most glorified his father and the father most glorified him.

That's the paradox of the cross that even as the world sees nothing but shame it was the single most glorious act of God. And I just wonder whether as Jesus was hanging from that cross whether he lifted his eyes metaphorically speaking and he could see the people assembled and coming to him.

That even as he cried it is finished that his heart throbbed and swelled with joy as he saw the sons and daughters of God coming from afar coming because he died for them.

And I'm sure too that he would have seen each and every one of us each one of us coming to find refuge in him coming to worship at his feet and at the father's feet.

[22 : 29] And some of us as Isaiah 60 says may be coming on our mother's hips as children. Others may be coming because we once used to despise the Lord.

We used to oppress him. But whatever it is Jesus welcomes all of us and with each passing day more continue to come to find refuge in him.

Salvation in him. Now we're not perfect by any means so this vision in Isaiah 60 hasn't reached its full fulfillment. As we look around in our own lives and in our church there is still sorrow there are still times of suffering instead of well-being but we are to believe by faith that when Jesus returns this grand vision of God and his perfected city will come to pass.

And next week as we look a bit more in Isaiah 65 we'll have a chance to think about that a bit more. But until that day we can still sing God's praise because we have entered the gates of that city.

We have found salvation within her walls. So friends take a look at each other. You're looking at the fellow citizens of this city.

[23 : 49] God has made us righteous by his son and one day we will possess the land forever and each of us even the least will become a mighty nation.

It's amazing isn't it because that is the exact same promise that God gave to Abraham and which he is now making to each and every one of us in Isaiah 60. And all this happens because God sent his son born on Christmas as a baby but he came to be the light.

The light that shines in the darkness. So keep coming to Jesus. If you haven't already done so today would be a good day to do that. But if you have continue to stay in the light of Jesus because that is the only place where we can reflect God's glory.

Let's pray. Father we thank you again for your son Jesus. We thank you again and again for what he has done for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us.

He who sat in glory by your side came down and humbled himself. suffered the shame for our sake so that he can be the light so that we can be drawn to him so that we can find in him salvation peace so that we can have a hope that one day we will possess the land forever and the least of us will be a mighty nation.

[25 : 16] Help us Lord to trust in your son even when everything else in the world tells us not to. Even if everything that we see says walk not by faith but by sight.

Help us to walk by faith. Faith in your son Jesus. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.