

Arise, Shine

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: 18 April 1999

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 18th of April 1999. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Arise, Shine, and is from Isaiah chapter 60 verses 1 to 22.

I'd like to keep that passage open from Isaiah chapter 60 page 602. And this is part of a sermon series through the book of Isaiah in these evening services.

Let's pray that God's spirit will help us to understand this passage and to apply it in our lives. Our God, we thank you that you have spoken in the past through your prophets.

A word that still abides for us today. And we pray that your spirit will teach us. We'll apply this word to our hearts that we may trust it and obey it.

[1 : 1 0] And bring glory to your holy name. Amen. I'm not much of a morning person. I'm a bit of a night owl.

So it takes something special to get me up to see the sunrise. But one day a few years ago I saw the sunrise in Jerusalem.

Half past five or six o'clock in the morning. Standing on top of a relatively tall building in the centre of the old city of Jerusalem. Glimpses of light coming from behind the Mount of Olives.

And then gradually the first rays of light hitting buildings in the old city of Jerusalem. And beautiful soft colours coming out of the stone.

And then as the sun climbed higher the colours not quite so soft but more sunlight hitting parts of Jerusalem. One of the striking things I guess was that it was quiet.

[2 : 1 8] Jerusalem is such a busy and noisy place. Teeming with people. A new day. Quiet beginning. Maybe for some a new hope.

The words at the beginning of this chapter are a bit like a rousing wake up call to come and see the sunrise. Arise, shine for your light has come.

But this is no ordinary sunrise. This is not really even the sun that's risen. For the light that has come is the glory of the Lord which has risen upon you.

This is not any new day that is being greeted here by this wake up call. This is God's final day. The dawn of a new era.

The dawn of heaven itself. And throughout this chapter it is a sustained offer of good news about the day that is dawning. The day of salvation.

[3 : 2 3] The city that's described is Jerusalem. But it's not just confined to the earthly Jerusalem. For the imagery and descriptions that are used transcend just the physical Jerusalem that you can now fly to by El Al Airlines.

This is the heavenly Jerusalem. God's place. God's eternal place. God's heavenly city. God's kingdom. God's kingdom.

And therefore these words, those spoken hundreds of years ago to Jews and Israelites in the 8th century BC, are nonetheless words spoken to us.

For that heavenly Jerusalem is as much our destiny as Christian people as theirs. And these words functioning to give them strength and hope have the same role for us as well.

They are words to us to give us sure and certain hope. For this is our destiny that is described in this chapter.

[4 : 32] Throughout the book of Isaiah, the people of God are living in darkness. Firstly, a darkness of their own sin and rebellion, their own lack of faith in God and idolatry and so on.

The people are living in darkness, even when they're in God's land, because of their sin and faithlessness. And then in the latter part of the book, the context changes.

Isaiah envisages the people being destroyed in Jerusalem and taken away to Babylon, a foreign country and foreign city. But nonetheless, still living in darkness, away from God's land, but more importantly, away from God.

Oh, he's promised some light. Back in chapter 9, the Messiah would come and bring light to people in darkness. But for those who live in darkness, nonetheless, the urgent plea is to trust God in the midst of darkness and not create your own light.

To these hearers and readers of Isaiah, especially those in exile in Babylon, there would have been despair, doubt, disillusionment, a turning away from God, a turning to other gods or no God at all.

[5 : 59] To them, this chapter is to bring them back to faith, to sustain the weary with a word. You see, this chapter is saying to them that the end is so good that it is worth persevering for.

If you want energy to endure the trials you are facing now, then a focus on this future will give you just that energy and zeal and confidence you need.

The light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak, will compel you to keep on with God. The Bible's actually got a lot to say about heaven.

Both testaments, old and new in fact. But probably without exception, when it talks about heaven, it is not giving us a description of what it will be like for our own information, like a real estate brochure telling us what rooms we're going to get in this wonderful mansion in the sky.

But rather the function of talking about heaven, especially on almost every page of the New Testament, is to give us a stimulus now for faith and righteous living here in the present.

[7 : 28] And the same function applies to this chapter. So if your Christian faith is flagging in any way, running out of zeal, then look to the future promised by God, which is so glorious and so good and so certain that it is worth persevering for now.

If perhaps your Christian life is struggling with some temptation to turn aside from God into wrong ways of behaving or believing, then focus on the future that God has promised for His people.

Because it is so good and so glorious and so certain that it is worth yielding to temptation every day for the sake of obtaining this.

Or if perhaps you're doubting God's power and love for you, wondering whether He really cares for you, focus on this picture of the future perfect destiny of God's people.

Because it's so good and so glorious and so certain that you'll persevere even despite doubts. Or to use Isaiah's words, if you're weary, then look to this heavenly rest because this will sustain you, this word of hope.

[9 : 05] Heed the command. Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. In Genesis chapter 1, before God started creating things, there was darkness over everything.

And then God said, let there be light and there was light. And so creation began. Metaphorically speaking, Isaiah envisages a world in darkness and now a new light for a new creation, a perfect, eternal, glorious and righteous creation that will never suffer from sin, decay or evil.

It is to that new creation that God is beckoning us, his people, as he beckoned his people of old through the prophet Isaiah, so he does today.

What then is described about this heavenly city in this chapter? What features of it are there for us to notice? I guess the first feature is that it's magnetic.

It attracts. It attracts people of any and every nation to come to it. You see, this is not an exclusive Jewish club, as so many Jews might have wished for.

[10 : 32] It is for people of every nation, every tribe, every tongue and language and race and colour. The nations of the world enter this city.

Verse 3, The nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes, look around, they all gather together, they come to you. This is a promise of salvation for people of any nation.

But secondly, the people of any nation who come bring with them the children, the sons, the daughters of Israel. So verse 4 goes on to say, Your sons shall come from far away, your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

So it's not just for people of other nations, but all of God's faithful descendants of Abraham, the same thing applies. And distance is no barrier. They'll be brought in without anyone being overlooked.

You see, this is not just the end of the physical exile from Jerusalem in Babylon, bringing them back to the city on earth. It is the end to the exile from God.

[11 : 42] It is bringing them in the end to God's eternal place, his heavenly city. But not only will the nations come and not only will the children of Israel come, but thirdly, wealth will come as well.

Verse 5, for example, Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you. I think that means all the trading that comes on the ships across the Mediterranean, an idea that's picked up also in verse 9 when it talks about the ships of Tarshish bringing silver and gold.

But also the wealth of the nations shall come to you. This is the reversal of the balance of trade deficit that's been going on in years past.

When all the treasures of Jerusalem were plundered and pillaged by the Babylonians, now the wealth in vast measure shall return to God's city.

So great will be this inflow of wealth that a multitude of camels shall cover you. That's probably not something that you find rather appealing at first sort of read.

[12 : 56] A multitude of camels covering you. How can you breathe with a great camel on top of you? The idea is of a great procession of camels coming from every direction and every nation, all centred on Jerusalem.

It's sort of like what Sydney's going to be like with the Olympics next year. Not with camels, but people of every nation all flocking to Sydney in aeroplanes and boats and walking and camels maybe and cars and trains, I suppose.

This is picturing, because camels are the means of transport, of course, to carry wealth and goods, this is picturing huge camel trains coming into this heavenly Jerusalem, in effect, bringing flocks and rams, in verse 7, and the silver and gold, in verse 9, and other wealth as well from all nations coming in.

Notice that the nations include Midian, in verse 6, which is one of Israel's traditional enemies against whom Gideon fought in the book of Judges. It includes Sheba, from whose queen wealth was given to King Solomon a few hundred years before Isaiah's day.

What I think that's saying is that when the Queen of Sheba arrived with Handel's music in the background and gave her wealth to King Solomon, it was seen as a prototype of the end, a foretaste of what the end would be, when the wealth of all nations would be brought into Jerusalem.

[14 : 21] And then notice the wealth that's brought in after that in verse 6. They shall bring gold and frankincense. Well, most of us would readily prick up our ears at that because where do we know of gold and frankincense but in December, when three kings of other nations, pagan kings, bring their wealth in to a little baby.

And Matthew's Gospel, which tells us about that gold and frankincense and myrrh as well, because it's a bigger fulfilment than Isaiah even anticipated, is again a prototype of what the end will be when the wealth of the world will be brought to God's place.

But a fourth feature is this, that these nations that are streaming in are at least in part, large part even, willing converts. They are coming to pay homage, not to the Jews.

You see, they're not coming into this Jerusalem city because they think the Jews are pretty special. They are coming to pay homage to God.

Or if you like, in Isaiah's terms, the king of God's people, Israel or Judah. What's going on here is a reversal of what's been happening in Israel's history leading up to the time of Isaiah.

[15 : 47] In the British Museum, there is an obelisk which has on it, in picture and hieroglyphics, an Israelite king, Jehu, giving tribute or honour or paying wealth, that is, to an Assyrian king.

He paid it out of honour, but to also buy peace from Assyria. This is the reverse. These are the kings of the nations now paying homage and bringing their wealth as tribute to Israel's God.

For it is he who is the triumphant one in the end. We see that they're not paying homage to the Jews, but rather to God.

By the end of verse 6, they shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. And in verse 7, the animals that are brought, the sheep and rams, will be acceptable on God's altar and I will glorify my glorious house.

So what these nations are doing is coming and bringing glory to God. Not so much his people. And they are praising God.

[16 : 59] These are willing converts. These are people who've got something to praise God for. The salvation which they've found in the God of Israel. You see, the heartbeat of this city of Jerusalem described in this chapter is praise of God.

See, heaven's more than just a good time of endless Richmond victories or something like that. Heaven's not just a place of eternal fun. Heaven is a place of God and of praise of God.

So it's a serious question then for all of us. to what extent does praise of God play a part in our lives now?

And by that I mean heartfelt praise. Not the empty words of singing songs and hymns. Because if there is no praise in our heart then we're not getting ready for heaven.

And indeed we may not even have a place there. But if the beat of our heart now is a beat of praise to God then heaven will be that in perfection.

[18 : 24] Throughout Isaiah it's been very clear that the reason God is doing whatever he's doing in history is to bring glory to himself in the world.

Primarily it's not for Israel's benefit that he acts. It's not even for the benefit of the other nations. It is for God's own glory. That may look selfish but it's true and it's right because God alone is worthy of glory of the world.

The reason why God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed and then to bring his people back there through a pagan ruler Cyrus and then to bring his own servant to restore them not to land but to himself.

Very strange things for God to be doing. The reason for all of them is to bring God glory in the world so that the world may know that God is God and acknowledge him as such.

Now Isaiah sees a picture of that coming to fulfillment. The nations of the world coming to God's place to praise God himself.

[19 : 34] Isaiah imagines that he's on the cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean when he says in verse 8 who are these that fly like a cloud and like doves to their windows and we see in verse 9 that they're ships and what he probably sees or pictures himself seeing are ships on the horizon the white billowing sails that look perhaps like clouds or maybe like birds flying but then as they get closer he discovers that they're ships coming from Tarshish bringing the wealth of the nations around the Mediterranean into Jerusalem bringing the children with them the silver and gold with them and the purpose again for the glory of God at the end of verse 9 they're doing this for the name of the Lord your God and for the Holy One of Israel because he has glorified you the reason God saves his people is to bring himself glory in the world and attract other people to himself that's why he saved you and me if we're Christian people so that his name will be glorified in this world not just for our own benefit in heaven and that's what

God has been promising to do all the way through Isaiah and now we see a vision of that being completed he goes on then from verse 10 to describe a bit more of this city in 587 BC Jerusalem was destroyed and its walls pulled down by foreigners Babylonians mainly but Edomites as well and others now literally it says in verse 10 sons of foreigners shall build up your walls a reversal of what had happened in 587 will occur not just a political reversal though but rather God's eternal plan the end of verse 10 says for in my wrath I struck you down wasn't actually the foreigners really it was God himself but in my favour I have had mercy on you mercy because this is not what Israel deserved it is God's mercy to restore them to himself and this picture of

Jerusalem will be of a city whose gates are always open not so much because it is now peaceful and secure though that is also true but rather because there's no time to shut them because of all the people coming in with their wealth you may know there's a bit of debate about whether Sydney airport will cope with the Olympic games because of the curfew that's placed on it planes aren't allowed to take off and land between something like 11pm and 5 or 6am nothing like that in this Jerusalem its gates will be open all hours because the camels will be streaming in with the silver and the gold and the children of Israel and all the frankincense and gold and so on open all hours this city peace and wealth streaming into it now let me pause for a minute because it could be that you are a person who thinks that a passage like this means that everybody in the end will be in

God's city saved there are people who think that that in the end everybody in the world is going to be with God and saved so really in the end why bother now but that's not the point of this chapter and verse 12 makes that very clear for the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish those nations shall be utterly laid waste you see there will be nations that refuse to heed God there will be people who refuse to heed God and bring him glory they'll be destroyed the end of verse 11 tells us that their kings will be led in procession it's a term that's applied to military triumph what it's referring to is that there will be kings and nations who will stream in willingly to give God glory but for those who refuse to give

God glory they'll be brought in forcibly as well before this same God not in salvation but they'll still be brought before God's throne that's saying what St.

[24 : 06] Paul says in those well-known words in Philippians too that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow not because every knee will bow willingly and with faith some will be forcibly bowing in humiliation not humility before the throne of God and this is fulfillment of God's purpose expressed way back at the beginning of the Bible to Abraham when he promised Abraham that the nations that bless you I will bless here are those the willing converts coming in proclaiming praise to God but the nations that curse you or the one that curses you I will curse that's verse 12 and they'll be brought forcibly to the throne of God the description goes on not only the walls rebuilt but the temple rebuilt in verse 13 but it's picture language because we're told in the New Testament there's no temple in heaven apart from God's people but this is using images that

God's Isaiah's hearers and readers would have understood to describe God with his people that's what the temple is all about and it's beautiful perfect the place where God's feet rest at the end of verse 13 is the temple because God dwelt in heaven but his feet rested in the holy of holies in the temple now if I've whetted your appetite for going to Jerusalem by the opening part of this sermon let me whetted it a little bit more if you go to Bethlehem just down the road from Jerusalem and enter the you don't walk through grand doors like St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne or London for that matter you walk through a little hole in the wall and it's low down it's not an accident it's deliberate so that everybody who walks in has to bow before the

God whose presence is regarded as being there in a sense that's forced humility bending low but it's the picture that's in verse 14 the descendants of those who oppressed you now the reversal is that they shall come bending low to you and all who despised you shall now bow down at your feet not to worship you the people of God but to worship your God as the rest of the verse goes on to make clear Isaiah's reversal from chapter 2 to the end is that the proud and the haughty will be brought down and God will be exalted so all those who exalt themselves will be brought down in humiliation and all those who are humble before God will as we'll see in a minute be exalted verse 15 tells us that whereas you've been forsaken and hated with no one passing through

I will make you and literally the word is exalted not just majestic but exalted as God himself is exalted this is this is the reversal humility now exaltation by God at the end haughtiness and pride now humiliation at the end and that's the reversal that began in chapter 2 of Isaiah and he sees it being fulfilled here in this picture of chapter 60 whereas the nations in the past sucked out the goodness of God's own people now the reverse will happen you shall suck the milk of nations and shall suck the breasts of kings clearly a metaphorical mixed image there because one would have expected breasts of queens I suppose the idea is there that Israel will enjoy the wealth and the goodness of the other nations round about and you shall know that I the

Lord and your Saviour and your Redeemer the mighty one of Jacob that's always God's purpose when he acts that people know that he is God not just that they benefit from his acts and then the city is described as being beautiful and permanent everything is upgraded two steps from bronze to gold from iron to silver from wood to bronze and from stones to iron metal being permanent probably and also being precious as well in this description and rather than having as your overseer and task master the evil people of Egypt when the Egyptians were subjected to slavery they're now the task master or the overseer will be peace and righteousness the very things that were lacking in the land at the beginning of the book are provided by the servant who died to make many righteous now righteousness is a feature of

[29 : 18] God's redeemed people no violence no devastation no destruction your walls will be salvation your gates shall be praise almost as though they're the things that guard you against evil wrongdoing or enemies this is a regime of peace and righteousness it's almost beyond our imaginations in our world that is so lacking in both those things and all of it is God's work not our achievement hence his praise this description was meant to whet the appetite of Israel's hearers and readers for heaven it was meant to give them stimulus on the way to give them energy to persevere to give them confidence in

God for us much of the imagery is foreign a picture of camels may not excite us all that much even a picture of Jerusalem may not be all that enticing but nonetheless just as for Isaiah's hearers and readers they were intended to dig deep in their desire for this place so ought we as well that desire ought to be ours for God's perfect city and perfect place no need for sun or moon because God's light is so brilliant those things are not needed in verses 19 and 20 no more mourning at the end of verse 20 that is no more grief or sadness or death that stimulates those things we're told in verse 21 that your people shall all be righteous that's the work of the servant of chapter 53 and they shall possess the land forever oh there are some people who say that this is really all about 1948

AD when all of a sudden out of the midst of a world in the world came a Jewish state centred around Jerusalem and that since 1948 or even a bit before there are Jews coming from every nation and land on ships through the Mediterranean bringing with them some wealth and the wealth especially from Christians in New York to establish Jerusalem and the nation of Israel but that's not what fulfills these words these words are far more glorious than that a city full of peace and righteousness a city full of salvation and praise a city where God is glorified and the work of his servant is seen and evident no my friends that's not the earthly Jerusalem of today it is the heavenly Jerusalem the land that is possessed forever is not the land bounded by the

Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River it is the eternal land described by the writer of the Hebrews that's the land that the Old Testament is headed towards and that's the land that's possessed forever here as well if the problem of meaninglessness is the most serious problem of our day and age this passage has the corrective for the purpose or meaning for life for all of us is the praise of God that's why we're made end of verse 21 echoes what we've already seen God is doing what he's doing that he might be glorified in us the Westminster confession of the 17th century said that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever that is fulfilled here but begun now in

Christian lives maybe like ancient Israel you doubt this sort of picture maybe you're not convinced that it will happen and will be realized in history God is its guarantor he stakes his name on it he stakes his reputation by it you know when somebody swears an oath to you and says if this doesn't happen then my name is not Fred blogs that's what God says in verse 22 he says I am the Lord in its time I will accomplish it quickly he's saying if this doesn't happen I'm not God see how serious this picture is God's own godness is at stake here if this does not happen but because God is God this will happen and we can have the absolute confidence in it the utmost sureness about it you see it's not just pie in the sky it's not just wishful thinking it is so certain and so good and so glorious that our lives now ought to be framed by it and lived in its light this picture of heaven ought to motivate us every day in our

[34 : 57] Christian life stirring up faithful obedience to God strengthening us against the sins of this world and its temptations giving us zeal when we flag giving us confidence when we doubt store up your treasure here live in the light of this that's why Isaiah was given these words that was their function to his hearers originally and the same applies for us that we can be even more sure and more confident and more certain about this because the servant Isaiah yet look forward to has already come for us and we've already seen and enjoyed the benefits of his death and resurrection and so we can have even more confidence that these words will be fully realized one day when he returns so arise and shine your light has come and the glory of the

Lord has risen upon you live in that light you in believed in to be as were■■■■oro yes you you