

All Saints Talk for 23 June 2024

The Power of Godly Vision. **Vision for prayer** — Tom Yacomeni

Isaiah 62: 1-7 Watchmen on the walls

*62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.
2 The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
3 You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
4 No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.
But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;
for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.
5 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.
6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem;
they will never be silent day or night.
You who call on the LORD,
give yourselves no rest,
7 and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem
and makes her the praise of the earth.*

Yesterday I had the privilege of taking the Wedding of Ella Nash and Will Lockton.

It was beautiful and there was such joy and celebration as these two young people committed their lives to one another before God and a tightly packed congregation.

Here is a picture of another wedding at Kelston with me in full vicar mode(!) This was a couple called Emma and Jack and it was wonderful to see that both these couples wanted to make their vows before God and honour the Lord in their wedding services.

Well these pictures of joy and gladness are at the epicentre of today's passage from Isaiah, because Isaiah depicts a glorious future for God's people like celebrating a Godly marriage.

We are in the last section of Isaiah which is sometimes called the 'songs of glory' because in chapters 60-66 the prophet describes the Glory of the Lord being restored to his people following the coming of the suffering servant, who would be anointed to bring salvation to God's people.

We looked last week at Isaiah 61 and the anointed one saying 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor and to announce the year of the Lord's favour'.

And Jesus, full of the power of the Holy Spirit proclaimed this moment of Jubilee and era of favour was fulfilled when he sat down after reading the scriptures in his hometown.

So now Isaiah 62 unpacks what this glorious spirit-filled kingdom of God would look like.

There is some confusion as to who exactly speaking in the opening verses of the chapter when it says 'For Zion's sake I will not keep silent...' Some commentators think this is God speaking directly or it is Isaiah putting God-like words together, but I think Isaiah is prophesying the same voice as the one who said in the previous chapter 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...' In other words this is the anointed one, the Christ, speaking. Instead of being led like a lamb to the slaughter, silent before its shearers, Israel's Saviour cannot now keep silent. His message needs to be proclaimed this is good news for God's people, and especially for Zion and Jerusalem.

He says: 'For Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet.'

So is Isaiah talking about the physical city of Jerusalem or a future spiritual city of God's rule and reign?

Well as we have seen throughout this series, I suspect the answer is both.

Judah and Israel were facing annihilation. So naturally Isaiah would have been praying for the restoration of Israel and the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. But when Jesus came, the focus shifted away from the physical city of Jerusalem and the temple of God's presence to become centred on Christ and the living temple of us his followers with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

But the Kingdom of God is glorious - verse 2 'the nations will see your vindication and all kings your glory.'

So what follows is a description of three things we can expect when we turn to Christ and God's kingdom is manifest in our lives.

Verse 2 gives us the first: 'You will be called by a new name'

Jesus sometimes literally gave new names to people which signified their new identity as his followers. Simon he called Peter, Saul became Paul but Revelation 2v17 says that God will give believers a new name written on a white stone that only he knows.

A Catholic monk once explained it this way:

“You have three selves: The person that you think you are, the person that other people think you are, and the person that God thinks you are. The white stone represents the latter. And of the three, it is by far the most important.”

Corinthians says that If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.’

So if you are a believer here today in other words you have chosen to put your faith in Jesus, then you are a new creation and you have a new identity in Christ, with a new name that God has assigned to you.

I wonder what your heavenly name is? Is it Faith, Grace, Courage, Wisdom, Honour?

There is a lovely tradition in some denominations that when someone gets baptised they are given a new name to reflect their new spiritual calling.

C S Lewis reflected this in the Narnia books when the Pevensie children were finally crowned after the defeat of the White witch. Peter was crowned ‘the magnificent’. Susan the gentle. Lucy the valiant. And Edmund the just.

In Gods kingdom you are given a new name and a new identity which forgets the former things and the sins of the past. Our life and our identity is now hidden with Christ and the righteousness he bought for us on the cross.

So we are given a new name, but then we are also given a new royal mandate.

Verse 3: You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Did you know you are a son or daughter of the King? And like a precious crown God sees you as precious and honoured, a seal of his royal sovereignty.

Isaiah 43v4 Because you are precious in My sight, You are honoured and I love you.

God takes pleasure in showing off his jewels. And if you are in Christ then you are one of them.

Thirdly he gives us a new relationship

Verse 5 As a young man marries a young woman, so will your builder marry you.

Jesus described the Kingdom of God like a wonderful wedding feast, and Revelation 19v6 says ‘the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

The Church is the bride of Christ and seeing Ella yesterday it was wonderful to see Will looking proud of her in her beautiful wedding dress. In the same way we are privileged to share a new intimacy with the Lord.

Someone described intimacy as 'In-To-Me-See' – in other words the Lord sees right into our hearts and minds and yet he still forgives, loves us and washes us clean from the inside out. Like a bride prepared for her wedding day, the Lord wants us to be spotless, pure and fully in love.

So God gives us a new identity, a new mandate and a new relationship.

And God is glorified as we work out our salvation – albeit sometimes with fear and trembling in our weakness.

But as the Westminster catechism puts it: 'The glory of God is man fully alive.'

So verses 1 to 5 are a great encouragement and there is much for us to grab hold of and enjoy. But then verses 6 and 7 are more sobering because it isn't all just plain sailing in the Kingdom of God – there are challenges to overcome:

⁶I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem;
they will never be silent day or night.
You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest,
⁷and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem
and makes her the praise of the earth.

In ancient times watchmen posted on the walls served as the early warning system for the city. They would alert the inhabitants to both approaching dangers but also look out for friendly messengers or hopefully the return of the king.

But just like Jesus asked his disciples to keep watch in the garden of Gethsemane, he is calling watchmen to pray and be alert to the spiritual battles that are raging around us.

We are all called to pray, and we are all called to be alert with our eyes open to the devil's schemes.

Particularly at such a time as this when we are tempted to compromise our faith in so many little but destructive ways, we need to listen to the watchmen who warn of dangers to come.

Now of course we need to be discerning and I am not one to go looking for demons and curses under every rock, but the truth is if we ignore the devil and his schemes we cannot resist them. Resist the devil and he will flee from you Paul says.

What are the issues in our day where evil can get a foothold? With an election in 11 days time, the devil as they say, is in the detail. What do the candidates really think about the Lord and his values for family, community and society? Perhaps tomorrow at the hustings, be praying like a watchman as they speak.

God wants watchmen on the walls who won't rest until the city is fully secure. They join in the work themselves and also call upon the King to send resources.

Intercessors look to stand in the gap, calling upon God to fulfil his promises and bring healing hope and restoration to broken situations and devastated places.

But God is also looking for watchmen, sentinels of prayer, who keep alert and awake, with prophetic insight are able to discern the signs of the times and warn the people.

Rachael Stone has the heart of a Watchman and her favourite glass sculpture was inspired by this verse.

God needs you to pray.

In an incredible way, he asks us to give him no rest and not rest ourselves until the Kingdom is established and the devil's work lingers no more.

I'll finish with a quote about prayer from one of the heroes of prayer George Muller:

Here is the secret of great success.

Work with all your might, but don't trust in the least in your work.

Pray with all your might for the blessing of God, but work at the same time with all diligence, all patience and all perseverance.

Pray, and then work.

Work and pray

And still again pray, and then work.

And so on all the days of your life.

The result will surely be abundant blessing.

George Muller.