

The City of the LORD

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 60:8-15

Preached On: Tuesday, January 22, 2013

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My text is taken from Isaiah 60, verse 8 down to verse 15 and I'd like to speak with you on this subject, "The City of the LORD." There was in Israel of old a place where God caused his name to dwell and it's known by different names in Scripture. Zion, it's called the city of our God, but it was but a type of the heavenly city, the heavenly Jerusalem. Jerusalem means "city of peace," and there is no true peace in anything temporal in this world. I hope you have at least learned that much in your life, that everything that seems to be permanent in this life isn't. As one old preacher friend of mine said, "We'd better hold to this life pretty loosely," with an open hand because nothing in it belongs to us: our relationships, our health, our wealth. Don't get too comfortable and I'm thankful that the Lord tenderly chastens his own and I speak from my own experience in that way, to keep us from getting our roots too deep in this life.

But the glorious thing is that there is that permanent city of the Lord that we find described in many places in Scripture and here particularly in Isaiah 60, we read in verse 8,

8 Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? 9 Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. 10 And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. 11 Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles [or the nations], and that their kings may be brought. 12 For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly destroyed. 13 The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. 14 The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee [here it is], The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

So what I want us to consider, particularly in this portion of Scripture, is how what I have just read for you typifies the drawing of sinners by the Lord to himself, calling them out of darkness unto the glorious light and to see that this is beyond just an earthly Jerusalem, particularly when it speaks there in verse 10, "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls." There are those that are the Lord's sheep among the nation of Israel, no question. Paul was such an example, but the true Israel is made up of sons of strangers, in other words, the Gentiles, the nations. When in the book of Acts we read that the apostles went around, first the Gospel was preached in Jerusalem and then in Samaria and throughout all of Judea, but the Lord purposed that it be taken into the uttermost parts of the world. Such has always been his purpose. Nothing has changed from eternity as far as God's purpose. He has always purposed to have a people of every tribe, nation and tongue.

For a while, over the millenniums, he worked that purpose through the nation of Israel, but today as far as the nation of Israel is concerned, there is not another prophecy yet to be fulfilled with regard to that nation. People that are looking over to Israel to try to determine the signs and seasons have misread the Scriptures. Even the apostles in Acts when Israel was blinded, the nation of Israel blinded and they turned against, were hardened against the Gospel being preached, the apostles shook the dust off their feet and said they were turning to another nation because they judged themselves unworthy of the message of Christ and him crucified.

So even though in the historic setting here in Isaiah it could be said it was fulfilled with regard to national Israel when they were brought back out of Babylon, 70 years captivity, and Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple. Some would say that that's the historic setting so still not something yet future to be accomplished in some earthly kingdom, yet everything that took place in history was a type, was a picture, of a spiritual work that God had purposed to do and that's what I want us to consider here, that work of calling sinners out from every tribe, nation and tongue unto the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Israel. He is the true Israel, Christ, and all those in him.

If you'll look with me just to a couple of verses in the New Testament that confirm this before we move on. Look in John 12. Keep your place here in Isaiah 60 because we'll come back but in John 12, notice in verse 37 just to get the context. John 12:37, it says, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." This is natural Israel. This is the one that John said, "He came unto his own and his own received him not." National Israel. "That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled." That's what I want you to see, that God was not surprised by the hardness of national Israel. Their nature is that of any sinner. Apart from the Spirit of God, it is hardened and against Christ, antichrist.

But it says here "That it might be fulfilled, which Isaiah which he spake, Lord, in saying who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" That's Isaiah 52:1. "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Now, some

people have a problem with that, but I would say to you as I've heard some say, "Why doesn't God just leave sinners to make the choice themselves?" That's a good question and there's a good answer too: if he did, there would be nothing but hardness. There wouldn't be anybody turning to Christ. By asking that, that God just leave it up to man, fallen creature, what you're asking God to do is condemn everybody, but God has purposed not to condemn everybody but to save some in his mercy and grace.

That's what we read in the rest of this, verse 41, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him." Whose glory? If you go on back in the context, the "he" goes all the way back to verse 37, "But though he had done so many miracles before them." So when Isaiah spoke of this, he's saying that Isaiah saw Christ's glory. Here was an example of God not leaving everyone in natural Israel to themselves because Isaiah was made to see Christ's glory. Just like Paul in writing in Romans 11 said, "Hath he forsaken the people that he has foreknown? God forbid!" Now, he's not talking about God not having forsaken all of natural Israel but Paul is thinking of himself, "I am a Hebrew of Hebrews. I am a Jew and yet the Lord did not forsake me. He was pleased to reveal Christ in me."

So he has blinded, for the most part, the nation of Israel even though there are in that nation his elect that he will continue to draw to himself, but the true Israel, as we're going to see here in a few verses, is made up of all those that the Lord has drawn to himself, the sons of strangers. It says there in verse 42, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world," there's that word "world." In other words, God's plan and purpose was not thwarted because of the unbelief of the Jews, on the contrary, the unbelief was according to what God had purposed. It was fulfilled, but he says, "I am come a light into the world," and notice, "that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." Whatever sinner it is that God causes to see the light of Christ in the world will believe on him and will not continue in darkness. It takes eyes to see light and those that the Lord has come to save, he causes that light to shine in their hearts and to draw them from the darkness into the light. So that's what we see represented here in Isaiah 60 where these are caused to come unto Christ.

Now, when you come back here to Isaiah 60, it asks this question then, "Who are these? Who are these that are caused to come from every part of the world and to build up the walls of this city called the city of the Lord?" Well, they are a multitude, that's for sure, because it says there in verse 8, "Who are these that fly as a cloud?" I think sometimes because we see in Scripture that God has chosen those sinners that he has purposed to save and as we look around we see so few, we assume that there are few. But this is an encouragement to me when I read, "Who are these that fly as a cloud?" Think of a great cloud. You look out and see this huge, humongous cloud. That's how these are described as a cloud that is dense; a cloud that is large, and covers a large area. Who are these? So we're not talking about a small number. Even though God has purposed in each

generation to have few meeting in one place or another, remember, even Elijah was discouraged and the Lord said, "I've got 7,000 that you don't even know about that have not bowed the knee to Baal. Just because you haven't seen them, doesn't mean that I don't have my people."

That's encouraging to me. This world is vast. The numbers continue to grow and I know we can get despondent about the way things are going and it seems like society is getting worse and worse. You hear everybody talking about it and yet my comfort is no matter how bad things get and that takes place when God does leave men to their own reprobate minds, they'll be hardened even more, yet we have this promise that there is that people among the nations that the Lord will be pleased to bring to himself.

He describes them as a cloud in verse 8, but he also describes them as "doves to their windows." In other words, winging their way back to their resting places and we know that, just like these homing pigeons you see, they find their way home. All those that God has purposed to save in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he will cause to wing their way back to him just like the dove in Noah's day. You remember, there was a dove and a raven that went forth and the raven went out and didn't come back. Why was that? Well, he found some carcasses. That's what a raven does, it feeds on dead wood, dead meat, and that describes men in false religion, dead works. But the dove when it was sent forth, came back where? To the ark and lit on the window with a branch in its beak and that was its resting place to come back to the ark and so it is here.

So that being said, let me give you a few more characteristics of this city of the Lord and the first thing that I would underscore in verse 9 particularly is that the city of the Lord is a refuge. We're talking about the city of the Lord. Think of the cities of refuge in the Old Testament where those who were guilty of murder would flee and find refuge in those cities where in each city there was a high priest. Here is the city of the Lord, a refuge for all who are drawn to Christ by the Spirit of God as the true sons of God.

When it says, "Surely the isles shall wait for me," nothing happens in this world but what God determines it. I don't care how men plan and scheme and attempt to get things done, nothing is going to move or happen or take place but what the Lord has already previously ordained. Now, therein we see man's idolatry because if something good happens, man likes to take the glory.

But with regard to the work of God, notice it says there, "the isles shall wait for me." "The isles" is a term to describe the coastal countries that surrounded Israel up in the plains in Europe and all around the Mediterranean Sea, "the isles shall wait for me." In other words, not one was going to move until the Lord said to move and so he directs all things.

But notice, "and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, and their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee." Now, again, historically this would have been fulfilled when that temple was rebuilt and after the captivity in Babylon and the Lord used

different means to bring the children of Israel back into the city. But, again, it's a type of how the Lord moves men and nations to bring his children unto himself and into that place, as it says here, "unto the name of the LORD thy God and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee." Israel in that earthly city of Jerusalem was but a picture, a type of Christ in salvation. It was in that place that Christ was lifted up, that he died, and he said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." It doesn't mean every single person but all sinners from every tribe, nation and tongue will be drawn unto him to this one place, to this one God, as it says here, "unto the name of the LORD thy God."

When you say, "Why does it say there in verse 9 their silver and their gold with them?" Well, as the temple of the Old Testament was being rebuilt, it took that silver and gold to build the instruments and the furniture of that particular temple again. But that's all a type and picture of worship. Even Peter said that if you look over with me in 1 Peter as a fulfillment. It's not the silver and the gold that has obtained our redemption. 1 Peter 1:18, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." That silver and gold was necessary for the building of the Old Testament temple. But what did it represent? Verse 19, "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times," notice, "for you, Who by him do believe in God." Don't just stop "for you," there is a comma, "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God."

So this drawing of these, again, from every corner of the world to the rebuilding of the temple that was historically fulfilled is a type and picture of the Lord's work in bringing out sinners from every corner of the world to Christ. So this city of the Lord is their refuge. That's what I listen for when someone tells me that they're a Christian. "Well, tell me how the Lord has dealt with you." If they come back and start talking about everything they did, "I this and I that. I turned over a new leaf. Or I decided," that's not the language of one who has been brought by the Lord, by his Spirit. Their one testimony is that they were in darkness and they were lost and they were in condemnation and when it pleased God to reveal Christ in me or in them, it is then that they flew to him like these doves to their windows. They were drawn to him and they came with one purpose and that is to worship and glorify their God, the holy one of Israel.

The second point that I would have you see here coming back to Isaiah 60:10 and that is that the city of the Lord, this salvation, is built with the precious stones of those sinners from throughout the world, built upon that one foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. When it says here in verse 10, "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls," as far as it pertains to the church, it's the walls that are built up with the sons of strangers. They were strangers and aliens in this world and yet the Lord, just like you go out into a quarry and bring in those precious stones and lay it on the foundation, Christ being that foundation, that's how these were brought. These walls were built up with the sons of strangers.

"And their kings shall minister unto thee," and we read, "for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee." We cannot judge finally and fully yet who

are the Lord's and who aren't as we look around the world. There are many that when you look at them, they're just like those stones still in the quarry lying there. Precious stones, you don't find them on the surface, but in the Lord's time, he will find them. He will draw them out and he will place them in his time on that one foundation which is Christ.

It appears that for a time in wrath they've been abandoned. We tend to judge men that way. We say, "Well all these are reprobates." We don't know that. There was even a time when you and I who were the Lord's, that we walked in this world in darkness and ignorance and if somebody who had some light were to have looked at us at any particular moment of time, they would have said, "There goes a reprobate," and yet when it pleased God to reveal Christ in us, he drew us and I believe that's the sense here. "In my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee."

Look with me in Revelation 21:19. I love how the Old Testament reflects the New. The Old Testament is one of type and picture and promise, the New is one of fulfillment and here in Revelation 21:19, well, you can see it speaks of the walls of the city in verse 18. "And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones." I believe there's a lot in that statement, "all manner of precious stones." There is not one precious stone like another. They all have their distinctive characteristics just like the Lord's people in the world. There is not one, in one sense, like the other, other than that God has made them precious stones in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the beauty is in how he brings them all together in his Son to worship his Son.

"The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." And notice, "I saw no temple therein." You see, that temple in the Old Testament was a picture of Christ who when he came fulfilled every aspect of that temple. He's the priest; he's the sacrifice; he's the altar; he's the Shekinah glory.

So in its fulfillment, John says, "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city," here it is, the city of the Lord fully described here, "had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." And it says there, "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." Doesn't that sound like Isaiah 60 that we're reading here where it says, verse 10 of Isaiah 60, "and their kings shall minister unto thee"? Their kings. Any that the Lord brings are brought as kings and priests unto him. They rule and they reign with him. So this city of the Lord is made up of sinners from every tribe, nation and tongue that Christ has redeemed by his blood.

But coming back to my text here in verse 11, this city of the Lord is a refuge of peace and safety from every condemnation. That's why I know that earthly Jerusalem over there in

Israel, it's not the city of the Lord. There is nothing but turmoil; nothing but conflict. I know even before my lifetime but all through my lifetime there has been nothing but talks and more talks; peace talks so-called about how to divide up that city because so many people are fighting over it. But we know that the true city of the Lord is a refuge of peace and safety from every condemnation. I believe that's what we see in verse 11 here of Isaiah 60, "Therefore thy gates shall be open continually." That sounds like a pretty safe place, wouldn't you say? "Thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought."

I'm grateful that this is a city into which the Lord is yet bringing sinners because it says there, "the gates shall not be shut," the essence is until the very last one that the Lord has purposed to save is brought in and that there is none that can stay their hand or keep the Lord from drawing every one that he has redeemed. I'm thankful. There are a lot of forces of evil out there. You think about the darkness of men's hearts. You think about Satan. You think about this world. Sometimes we say that of loved ones, "I wish the world didn't have such a hold on them." Well, the world has a hold on all of us but for the grace of God. Our flesh, Satan, there are many enemies that stand against us, but the glorious truth is that none of these things can keep the Lord from drawing those that he has redeemed.

So it says, "the gates shall be open continually," that is until the very last one is brought in. I know that preachers today in modern religion like to threaten people. They'll say, "Don't walk out that door because the gate might be shut as of today." Well, if the Lord has redeemed them it won't be shut. It doesn't mean that we're not concerned for men's souls but we're not trying to scare people into heaven. We're not trying to scare people into some sort of decision. I'm confident that no matter how hardened a sinner is, if they're the Lord's that gate is open. He has opened that gate and it will be continually open until he, the Shepherd, has been pleased to draw such a one in.

But in verse 12, we see also a fourth thing about this city and that it excludes all enemies. You never have to worry about the church being defeated, even though there are times in the world where it seems at times that it's being overrun. It's just the church as an organization that's been overrun but not the true church of God. It cannot be overrun. It cannot be extinguished. The Lord has always preserved unto himself a people in every generation and that's what we see here in verse 12, "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."

I'm never worried about the world or the enemies of the Gospel ever having an upper hand with regard to the Lord's people. This city of the Lord is stronger than even the strongest enemy. You look back over history at how men have tried to corrupt the Bible or destroy it. It's like in our day, today we hear about men keeping God out of the schools. That's such a foolish statement. There is not one school that has ever been able to keep God out. Why? Because if there is anyone of his own in those schools, that one is going to worship God in truth and there is none that can stop them.

You haven't kept prayer out of the schools, all you've done is keep a ceremony out of schools and I've always said, even if tomorrow they declared that, "We're bringing prayer back into the schools," I would probably be the biggest antagonist saying, "Well, which God are we going to address here now that you've brought prayer back in? When you say, 'Let's bow our heads and let's pray,' to which God are we praying?" The next thing you know, you'll be thrown out because that's not prayer. I truly do not believe that they've ever been able to keep one of the Lord's from praying. Why? Because our prayers are not addressed in a public manner to be seen of men. Our prayers are addressed unto God out of a heart that the Lord himself has been pleased in his grace and mercy to tender and to give us that cry. We know not how to pray as we ought. That's clear, but we've never been able to keep one of the Lord's from crying unto him and calling on his name.

So here's a fifth thing down in verse 13 and that is that the city of the Lord that is described here is more glorious than any earthly kingdom could compare. That's why, to me, it's so demeaning to the work of the Lord and what he has purposed to do in Christ to hear people today talking about going back and building up some earthly nation or some earthly kingdom or some earthly city or some earthly temple. Here it says, "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious." Now, again, these trees of Lebanon, that was the glory of Lebanon. When the temple was rebuilt, that's where they went to get the wood to bring it down to set this temple apart from any other earthly temple that existed and that has been fulfilled. That was done. We're not to look again to the future to see how this verse might in some future kingdom be fulfilled.

But why go outside of Israel? Why these particular trees that were used to build and rebuild this temple and the structure of it? Well, it's because of what they typify. It's like in the Old Testament, the shittim wood, why a particular wood that was used? Well, it described the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Covered with gold. It had to do with his deity. That's why the Lord told Moses, "Make sure that every aspect of the building of this temple is according to what I tell you." Why? Because it represented the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But as I read this, especially where it says, "to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious," where is it now ultimately that God has caused his name to dwell? It's in his Son. He is that temple. Christ said that, "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll build it again," and they said, "This temple," they were speaking of this temple that was rebuilt after the captivity of Babylon. They said, "It's been being constructed over the last 40 some years and you're saying that you're going to destroy it and in three days rebuild it?" They didn't understand that Christ wasn't talking about that earthly temple, he was talking about the temple of his body and that is the true temple of God. That is where God has caused the place of his feet or the feet of his people to be glorious. "I will make the place of my feet glorious." That's where God has planted his feet, so to speak, it's in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I will tell you, there is no more glorious temple than him. Hebrews says he is the better sacrifice. He's the better ministry. He's the better altar and in him we have all the glory of God revealed.

Then a sixth thing about the city of the Lord down here in verses 14 and 15 to wrap this up. It says there, "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel." What we see here is that the city of the Lord is a refuge for those who were at one time enemies. You know, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Christ did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

It says, "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee." I've often used the example of Saul of Tarsus, how he breathed out threatenings against the church and against the Lord's people until it pleased God to reveal Christ in him and then he too was brought to bow at the feet of Christ. He too was brought to be laid low at Christ's feet and brought into this city, the city of the Lord, the Zion of the holy one of Israel. As I've mentioned before, I don't believe there were too many in Paul's day that were praying for him. There were probably a number praying against him but not praying for him and yet he was one of the Lord's all the time. He was one that the Lord had redeemed, that God had chosen, and in his time he brought him into the fold.

I believe that's what's described here and even those that are the Lord's in verse 15, "Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations." That's the one joyous truth that I find in Scripture is that when this story is all said and done, when this history of this world is wrapped up, there is going to be a people that has been established forever, throughout eternity. There is right now a church that's worshiping in heaven that never stops. We're about to part. We're about to go out that door and go back out into this wild world, but there is a place of rest, there is a refuge that those that have gone on before, that God has chosen and Christ redeemed, that continue above the fray of this world and it's wickedness, continue to worship the Lord around the throne of the Lamb singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" You think about the number that are there having had their blood shed by the enemies of Christ, and yet they're at peace. They're like the doves that have flown to the window and they glory and rejoice in Christ.

That's my hope even now that gives me rest in this world in spite of men's antagonisms, in spite of the hatred of men toward this very God and Christ that the Lord has so taught me. I rest and know that he, in his time, will gather all those that he has redeemed. That's why I pray the Lord help me not to react too much when people do get their back up. For all I know that may be one of the Lord's, it's just that the Lord hasn't been pleased to reveal himself in them yet but if he's the Lord's, he'll get him and he'll draw him.