

“The City Of God”
Isaiah 33:20-21

Introduction:

1. Tonight - We Are Going To:
 - Look At Another Hymn:
 - That Was Written By:
 - John Newton - Whose Most Famous Hymn:
 - Is - Of Course - Amazing Grace!
 - But - As We Mentioned Last Time:
 - It Took Some Time:
 - For That Hymn:
 - To Become Popular!
 - Even Some 50 Years:
 - After Newton’s Death:
 - In 1807 - And Even Then:
 - Mostly In America!
 - But - The Most Popular Hymn:
 - Written By Newton:
 - In His Own Lifetime:
 - Was The Hymn We Learned About:
 - Last Week!
 - “How Sweet The Name Of Jesus Sounds!”
 - Which Teaches Us Much:
 - About The Doctrines Of Christ!
3. Well - Tonight:
 - We Will Look At:
 - Another One Of His More Well-Known Hymns!
 - And - The Main Theme Comes From:
 - Isaiah 33! So - Lets Turn In Our Bibles:
 - There First!
 - But - This Time - The Fame Of This Hymn:
 - Remained In The Country:
 - Where Newton Wrote It!
 - In England Itself!
 - And - The Title We Know It By:
 - Is “Glorious Things Of Thee Are Spoken!”
 - But - Newton Titled It:
 - “Zion - Or - The City Of God!”
4. And - Like Most Of The Other Hymns:
 - Newton Wrote - We Know:
 - When It Was Written & First Sung!
 - And - Newton Wrote This One:
 - To Be Sung On Easter Sunday:
 - April 16, 1775!
 - Now - Most Of The Time:
 - Newton’s Hymns Were Written:
 - Within The Same Week He Was Studying & Meditating On The Passage:
 - He Would Preach The Following Sunday!
 - But - Since That Sunday Was Easter:
 - Things Were A Bit Different:
 - For This Hymn!
5. We Know From His Diary:
 - That He Preached Two Easter Messages:
 - On That Easter Sunday!
 - First - In The Regular:
 - Morning Service:
 - Of His Church! And:

- Second - In An Afternoon Service:
 - At His Church In Olney, England!
 - We Even Know The Texts From Which He Preached:
 - On That Easter Sunday!
 - John 20:12 & Proverbs 13:15!
 - But - For The Evening Service:
 - On That Easter Sunday:
 - All That Newton Recorded In His Diary:
 - Was The Title Of The Hymn That He Had Written Earlier That Week!
 - So - More Than Likely:
 - He Did What We're Doing:
 - On Sunday Nights This Year!
 - Which Is - To Explain:
 - The Doctrines That He Wrote About:
 - In His Hymn!
6. Now - One Interesting Thing:
- That We Learn From His Diary:
 - Is That He Wasn't Feeling All That Well:
 - At The Beginning Of That Easter Sunday!
 - He Even Wrote:
 - That He - "Felt Something Of A Sore Throat In The Morning – But Speaking Was So Far From Hurting Me, That I Found Myself Quite Well At Night!"
 - And Then He Added:
 - "I Have Much To Be Thankful To The Lord For In The Course Of Last Week! Preventing Illness, And Supplying Me For Services!"
 - He Experienced God's Blessing On That Easter:
 - In Such A Way - That He Even Said:
 - "I Was Helped to Speak From (His Hymn That Night) With Liberty, And The Great House Was Exceedingly Full!"
 - And So - He Finished His Diary's Entry:
 - With A Special Prayer:
 - "O For A Blessing! And O For A Heart To Desire A Blessing More Earnestly!"
7. And So - That Is The Little We Know:
- About Why He Wrote This Hymn!
 - But - I Think The When:
 - Easter - Can Help Us Understand Even More:
 - About The Why!
 - But Also - The Scripture Text:
 - That Newton Wrote Beside:
 - The Text Of His Hymn:
 - Also Tells Us That His Mind Was Focused On The Theme:
 - Of "Zion!"
 - In Isaiah 33:20-21:
 - We Read These Words:
 - Urging Us To - "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle [that] shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. / But there the glorious LORD [will be] unto us a place of broad rivers [and] streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby!"
8. Already We Can Hear:
- The Echos Of Some Of These Verses:
 - In The First Stanza Of:
 - Newton's Hymn!
 - Which He Wrote In:
 - Five Stanzas!
 - Let's Read Through The First Stanza Together:
 - *Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God!*

*He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for his own abode:
On the rock of ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.*

9. Now - If This Is A Hymn About:
- "Zion" - We Have Ask Ourselves:
 - What Is This "Zion?"
 - And - What Does Newton Mean:
 - When He Describes "Zion" In The Ways He Does!
 - Because - At Times In This Hymn:
 - Zion Seems To Refer To:
 - A Place On Earth!
 - Other Times - It Seems To Refer To:
 - A Place In Heaven!
 - Then - In Some Places:
 - He Seems To Describe:
 - The Nation Of Israel!
 - While At Other Places:
 - He Seems To Describe:
 - The Church!
 - Also - There Are Times:
 - When He Uses Descriptions:
 - Of The Past!
 - While At Other Times:
 - He Clearly Uses Descriptions:
 - That Are Still In The Future!
 - One Hymnologist Even Says That:
 - Newton - "Seems To Make Old Testament Texts That Refer To Earthly Jerusalem Symbolic Of Heaven! (So That) Historic And Prophetic Earthly Zion Disappears From His View!" (Robert Cottrill - WordWiseHymns)
 - But - This Ambiguity Was No Doubt:
 - Newton's Intention!
 - Because - For Him - "Zion" Was & Is:
 - What We Might Call:
 - "The Special Place Of God's Special Presence For His Special People!"
 - Wherever & Whenever They Live!
10. And So:
- You Can Trace:
 - God's Special Place:
 - All Throughout The Bible!
 - In The Old Testament:
 - The Camp Of Israel:
 - Became The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - For His Special People!
 - Which Is Why In Newton's Third Verse:
 - He Talks About Zion In Terms Of:
 - God's Presence In The Wilderness!
 - Where - His "Cloud & Fire" Appeared! And Where His People "Safe They Feed Upon The Manna Which He Gives Them When They Pray!"
 - Also In The Old Testament:
 - The Temple:
 - Became The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - For His People!
 - Which Was Built By King Solomon:

- On The Physical Location:
 - Just To The North Of Old City Of The Jebusites:
 - The Mountain Of Zion & Moriah, Where Abraham Was About To Offered Isaac His Son To The Lord As A Sacrifice!
- But - Its Interesting Because:
 - As Glorious As The Name "Zion" Sounds:
 - As We Sing This Hymn - And:
 - As We Read Scripture:
 - "Zion" Actually Means:
 - "Parched Place" Or "A Desert!"
- The Original Zion:
 - Was Not At All Glorious:
 - From The Perspective Of Man!
 - It Was A Rough & Barren & Rocky Place:
 - Exposed To The Heat Of The Sun & To The Harshness Of The Weather!
 - Even Today - The Top Of Zion:
 - Can Be Seen Under The Roof Of:
 - The Dome Of The Rock:
 - In Jerusalem!
 - But - What Made Zion Glorious?
 - Or Rather - Who?
 - God Did!
 - He Was The One Who Chose:
 - The Parched Place Of Zion:
 - To Be The Place Of His Glorious Provision!
 - When He Gave To Abraham:
 - A Ram Caught In The Thickets:
 - To Be The Substitute For:
 - His Son, Isaac!
 - The Lord Was Also The One Who Chose:
 - The Parched Place Of Zion:
 - To Be The Place Of His Glorious Presence!
 - When He Showed David:
 - Where He Should Build The Temple:
 - In The "Threshingfloor Of Araunah The Jebusite" - Which Stood Under The Shadow Of The Rocky Top Of The Mountain!
 - But - Did This Zion:
 - Remain The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - For His People?
 - No! Because:
 - In The New Testament:
 - The Place Of God's Presence:
 - Became His Own People:
 - The Church!
 - A People - Not From:
 - Just One Nation:
 - But From Many!
 - Even From Those Who Are Redeemed To God - Through Christ's Blood - Out Of "Every Kindred, And Tongue, And People, And Nation!" (Revelation 5:9)
 - And Those Special People:
 - Are The Now Place Of:
 - His Special Presence!
 - His New Temple!
 - And Even - His New Zion!
 - 1 Corinthians 3:16 - "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and [that] the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

- This Is Why So Much Of What We Find:
 - In Newton's First Stanza:
 - Can Be Applied:
 - Not To A Place - But:
 - To The Church! The People Of God!
 - And Yet - Elsewhere In The New Testament:
 - We Find Another Reference:
 - To The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - For God's Special People!
 - And That Is Heaven!
 - In Hebrews 12:22 - We Are Told That:
 - As Believers In Christ:
 - "Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels!"
 - So - Zion Can Be Both:
 - A People & A Place!
 - A People On Earth:
 - In Whom God Dwells!
 - And - A Place In Heaven:
 - From Which God Reigns!
11. And So - To Newton:
- Zion Becomes A Biblical Symbol:
 - Of The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - For God's Special People:
 - Wherever His People May Be!
12. And So - This Hymn Really Teaches Us:
- Some Special Doctrine:
 - About The Church!
 - Because - Wherever God's People Are:
 - God's Presence Is:
 - In Unique & Special Ways!
 - And So - The Church:
 - Like Zion:
 - Is The Place Of God's Special Presence:
 - In This World!
 - In Isaiah 33:20:
 - We Are Urged To "Look Upon Zion" Because:
 - In 33:21 - It Is "There The Glorious Lord Will Be Unto Us A Place Of Broad Rivers And Streams!"
 - And So - This Is What Newton Writes About In:
 - The First Stanza:
 - Of This Hymn!
 - *Glorious things of thee are spoken,*
 - *Zion, city of our God!*
 - *He, whose word cannot be broken,*
 - *Formed thee for his own abode:*
 - *On the rock of ages founded,*
 - *What can shake thy sure repose?*
 - *With salvation's walls surrounded,*
 - *Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.*
 - Remember - It Is The Church:
 - That God Formed For:
 - "His Own Abode!"
 - Also - The Church:
 - Like Zion:
 - Is The Place Of God's Special Provision!

- In Isaiah 33:20:
 - We Are Told To “Look Upon Zion!”
 - Because It Is “The City Of Our Solemnities!”
 - Or - A City Of Holy Feasts & Festivals!
 - How Can Be This Way?
 - Because Of The Great & Gracious Provision Of The Lord!
 - Which Newton Tells Us About In His Second Stanza:
 - *See! the streams of living waters*
 - Springing from eternal love;*
 - Well supply thy sons and daughters,*
 - And all fear of want remove:*
 - Who can faint while such a river*
 - Ever flows their thirst to assuage?*
 - Grace, which like the Lord, the giver,*
 - Never fails from age to age.*
 - Is There Anything Else:
 - That You & I Might Need:
 - That The Lord Cannot & Will Not Provide?
- Also - The Church:
 - Like Zion:
 - Is The Place Of God’s Special Protection!
 - This Is The Stress:
 - Of Much Of Isaiah 33:20-21:
 - Because - When You “Look Upon Zion” It Will Be:
 - A “Quiet Habitation!” All Because Of God’s Protection!
 - On Which Newton Focuses Our Attention:
 - In His Third Stanza!
 - *Round each habitation hovering,*
 - See the cloud and fire appear!*
 - For a glory and a covering,*
 - Showing that the Lord is near:*
 - Thus deriving from their banner*
 - Light by night, and shade by day;*
 - Safe they feed upon the manna*
 - Which he gives them when they pray.*
 - This Is Who God Is:
 - To His People!
 - He Is Our “Light By Night” And Our “Shade By Day!”
 - And - Because Of This - The Church:
 - Like Zion:
 - Should Be The Place Of God’s Special Praise!
 - This Is Why Newton Urges Us:
 - In His Fourth Stanza:
 - To Reflect His Love Back To Him:
 - With “Solemn Praises” As “Thank-Offerings” To The Lord!
 - *Blest inhabitants of Zion,*
 - Washed in the Redeemer's blood!*
 - Jesus, whom their souls rely on,*
 - Makes them kings and priests to God: (h)*
 - 'Tis his love his people raises*
 - Over self to reign as kings,*
 - And as priests, his solemn praises*
 - Each for a thank-offering brings.*
- And Then - In The Last Stanza:
 - Newton Wants Us To Contemplate:
 - Whether We Really Are:
 - Members Of God’s Zion!
 - Because - Only To:

- God's Special People:
 - Will God's Special Presence:
 - Bring Special And Eternal Pleasure And Joy!
- A Pleasure & A Treasure:
 - That The World Knows Nothing Of!
 - So - Contemplate & Pray When You Sing:

*- Saviour, if of Zion's city
 I through grace a member am;
 Let the world deride or pity,
 I will glory in thy name:
 Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
 All his boasted pomp and show;
 Solid joys and lasting treasure,
 None but Zion's children know!*

13. What A Beautiful Hymn:

- That Describes What Can Happen:
 - To Such A "Parched Place" Like:
 - The First Zion - Which Is Just A Picture Of:
 - What God Can Do To:
 - "Parched People" Like Us:
 - By Making Us The Special Place Of His Special Presence!
- When God Is There:
 - He Can Change:
 - The Wilderness Of Zion:
 - Into A Garden - Even Greater:
 - Than The One In Eden!
- When God Is There:
 - He Can Change:
 - The Barren Mountaintop Of Zion:
 - Into A Lush Valley:
 - Where "The Streams Of Living Waters Spring From Eternal Love Well Supply (His) Sons And Daughters, And All Fear Of Want Removed!"
- When God Is There:
 - He Can Change:
 - Sinful People - Who Are:
 - Citizens Of This World!
 - Into His People:
 - Who Become Saints & Citizens:
 - Of Zion!

Conclusion:

1. In A Moment:
 - We Will Sing This Hymn!
 - But As We Do - Remember That:
 - Zion Is So Much More Than:
 - Just A Physical Place & Location!
 - It Is The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - Both With & For:
 - His Special People!
 - For Us! For His Church!
2. Closing Prayer!
 - Now - The Tune We Commonly Use To Sing:
 - This Hymn - Has Been Associated With It:
 - For A Long Time!
 - It Was Composed By:
 - Franz Joseph Haydn In 1797:
 - But Originally - Not For Newton's Hymn!

- It Was The Tune For The National Anthem Of Imperial Austria!
 - Eventually - It Became:
 - The Tune Used For:
 - The German National Anthem:
 - And Still Is!
 - These Facts Have Sometimes Caused:
 - Strife & Controversy:
 - Especially When It Comes To:
 - This Hymn!
 - Because - During World War 2:
 - Two Songs Used The Same Tune:
 - In Two Different Countries - And:
 - In Two Different Contexts!
 - And - Even Though The Countries:
 - Were Enemies - It Was The Contexts:
 - That Was The Biggest Problem!
 - In England - The Context Was:
 - The Triumph *Of* God's People:
 - The Church!
 - Whereas - In Germany - The Context Was:
 - The Triumph *Over* God's People:
 - The Jews!
 - And So - The Tune Used For This Hymn:
 - In England Was Changed:
 - To Something Written By Another Englishman:
 - In 1941 - In The Middle Of:
 - World War 2 - Titled "Abbot's Leigh!"
 - In England - This Newer Tune:
 - Is How You Would Sing Newton's Hymn!
 - But - We Will Use The Tune:
 - We Are Most Familiar With!
3. And - As We Sing:
- Just Think Of The Great Privilege:
 - You Have To Be:
 - "Through Grace A Member" Of:
 - "Zion's City!"
 - Which Will Always Stand For:
 - The Special Place:
 - Of God's Special Presence:
 - With His Special People!

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