

## Latter Day Glories

*The Gospel According to Isaiah*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 2

**Preached on:** Sunday, September 29, 2013

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Let's take our Bibles and turn to Isaiah 2. "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown," so said Henry IV in Shakespeare's play by that name. Henry reflects on the "vile of his realm" who after hours of drudgery and in their "loathsome beds" have a good night's rest while he, the king, cannot. Even the watch sea-boy perched high on the mast amid the winds and the waves, nods off easily at his post while quiet nights on the royal couch bring no rest to poor King Henry.

It breaks your heart thinking about a king not being able to sleep, doesn't it? Well, a hundred years or so after the time of Isaiah the prophet, a king, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, one night found no rest. We are told that he had dreams; that his spirit was troubled and that his sleep left him. At the end of the sleepless night, in the morning, he called on all his wise men, the wise men of Babylon, to appear before him. When the king commanded, of course, you obeyed and so they gathered there and the king told them about his dream. He told them he'd had a dream and he invited their interpretation of the dream. They were eager to please him, of course, and so they said, "Well, sir, if you will tell us what your dream is, we will give you the interpretation of your dream." But Nebuchadnezzar was a shrewd old guy and he realized that he wanted to assure that his wise men wouldn't just tell him what he wanted to hear so he set them a test. He said, "You tell me what my dream was and then I'll listen to your interpretation."

Meanwhile, they are kind of getting uncomfortable and are prevaricating and are using all kinds of excuses as to why it was that he needed to tell them what the dream was before they could interpret it. But eventually, he got fed up with them and he just decreed that all the wise men of Babylon should be executed. Among the wise men of Babylon who weren't at that royal reception, were Daniel and his three friends and they decided that they would apply to a greater King. They prayed to the God of heaven and the God of heaven revealed to Daniel what the king's dream was.

Daniel comes in and he tells the king, "This is what you dreamt. You dreamt you saw an enormous giant image, towering over the horizon. It was made of gold and silver and bronze and iron and it represents great empires beginning with yours, O King Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom of Babylon. It will be followed by Persia and Greece and Rome, great empires of the world. And in your dream, O King, you saw a little stone

rolling down the mountain and smashing into this enormous image and shattering it to pieces. A little stone just like King David used when he brought down the great giant. This little stone will bring down all these empires. That little stone represents a time that's coming in the latter days when God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed and that kingdom will not be left for someone else to take over. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms but it, itself, will endure forever."

Nebuchadnezzar's dream interpreted by Daniel saw the fulfillment of the Great Commission given to Adam in the Garden of Eden when he was told to fill the earth and rule over the earth. This little stone that smashes the image goes on to become a great mountain that will fill the whole earth; this kingdom that will begin so small will become so significant that it will comprehend the entire planet in its scope. It's a great picture; it's a mental image and you need a bit of imagination to try and think about it. I know imagination is not something you're used to unless you build Lego cars for some little boy somewhere which I'm going to have to do, I suppose, later on today.

Now, Daniel's experience and his reference to the latter days links that explanation that he gives to Nebuchadnezzar to what we've just read from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah uses the phrase "the latter days" and he gives us this great statement which you will also find in the book of Micah, virtually word-for-word in Micah 4, referring to everything that is to come. In Jewish thought, the present was in front of you and the future was behind your back, you couldn't see it. And whenever this expression "the latter days" is used in the Bible, very often it is used of everything that's behind your back, everything that you can't see yet, that is to come. As time went on, the expression became more refined. Not only was it referring to the things that are to come but specifically the things that are going to come right at the very end of the story, right at the very end of history, the latter days.

The first time it's used in the Bible is in Genesis where there is a prophecy of one of the tribes, one of the sons of Jacob, the tribe of Judah. There's the promise there of a kingdom and a king coming from the tribe of Judah in the latter days and this kingdom and this king will have the obedience of all the nations. All the nations will come to obey this king who is coming from the tribe of Judah in the latter days. You can see the connection: Isaiah is reflecting that text; Daniel is reflecting both that text and Isaiah's text and we're beginning to get a picture here of what God's purpose is. It's going to concern the tribe of Judah; it's going to concern a king and a kingdom; it's going to concern the latter days, the end of time. And it's going to involve all the nations coming under the sovereignty, under the sway of someone from the tribe of Judah. That is the overview, if you will, of this passage as we come to see it today.

Now, Isaiah is very conscious, you'll notice in verse 1, conscious that he has been given a vision from God, "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw." Prophets in Israel were often called "seers" because they saw farther forward, deeper in, than anyone else because of the revelation that God had given to them. And the subject about which he's writing, is the subject of Zion. Zion which is the latter days, heaven upon earth, city of God destined to bring blessing to the whole world. That's the focus of this vision. And

it's even narrower than that, you see, because, "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established."

Now, there's a very specific meaning here. Zion, or Mount Zion, was on the top of the mountain on which Jerusalem is built, Mount Moriah. There is another little mountain on top of it, just another little hill, it's very small, and that is where the temple was built. The temple was built on Mount Zion and came to be associated with that mountain. So Zion was both Jerusalem but particularly the temple, the place where God was present and the place where God was worshipped. For example: the mountain of the house of the Lord is sometimes called his "holy mountain" or his "holy hill." In Psalm 16, "the holy hill" equals the tabernacle, the sanctuary. In Psalm 24, "the hill of the Lord" equals his holy place, that is, the innermost part of the sanctuary. Every temple in the Bible is associated with a hill, even Eden is associated with a hill. When you read it in Genesis about Eden, you find that from Eden flowed three major rivers that nourished the surrounding countryside and if you know anything about your geography, you'll know that rivers flow from mountains; they flow downwards; they flow from mountains as their source and down they go into the valleys and out to the sea. Not only do we know that geographically, we also know it biblically because in Ezekiel 28, there is a reference to Eden, the Garden of God, on the holy mountain of God.

So, the mountain and the temple are associated throughout Scripture and here it is quite clearly delineated: it's the mountain of the house of the Lord. The house is the dwelling place of God, the temple of God, the place where God meets with us, the place where God is present in the world with his people. And as time goes on in the history of redemption, we discover that that little stone that came out of the side of the mountain that smashed the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, that little stone represented one person from the tribe of Judah, the Messiah, the stone which the builders rejected which became the cornerstone. The stone, as it were, of David that brings down all the empires of the world and establishes a kingdom that will never, ever cease.

And the people who become part of his kingdom, the people become part of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the final temple. You remember, he draws attention to himself when he comes into the world; he draws attention to his own body and he says to the people, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." That's precisely what he did. They destroyed the temple of his body and he raised that body up and in his resurrection body, Jesus is the Holy of Holies now, the place where God is present in all his fullness. All the fullness of God is pleased to dwell in him in bodily form. He becomes the receptacle, the point of focus in our worship. We worship God in Jesus. He is the one that we are connected to by faith. Jesus connects earth to heaven so that when we gather and pray in Jesus' name we are heard in heaven. When we gather together to praise in Jesus' name, our praises are heard in heaven. And when we draw near to God in Jesus' name, no matter who we are or what we are or what our record has been, we draw near to God in heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We just read that anyone who comes to Jesus comes into the community of Jesus' people which is known in Scripture as Zion, the city of God, the community, the society, the

church of God. Zion, city of our God. We have come, did you notice that in the reading that we had from Hebrews earlier on “you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. To God, the judge of all.” Remember the connection with Isaiah here of judgment and judging and “to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.”

So, let me get this into your heads, I’ll test you as you leave the door, get this: Jesus is the final temple. Everybody who is connected to Jesus, Peter says, is like a living stone. The temple is now no longer a building, it is a moving, living mass of men and women and boys and girls who are connected to his head, to the pinnacle of the temple, to the one who is its chief cornerstone, the one is the Holy of Holies. Here we all are and in our interrelations with one another and in our interrelation with him, we become a spiritual house in which God lives by the Holy Spirit.

And on the day of Pentecost, Peter says “these are the latter days.” He uses the same construction as is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Isaiah 2. The only place, by the way, it’s used in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The exact construction. Peter says, “these are the last days; these latter days, God has acted.” How has he acted? He has sent his Spirit. How has he sent his Spirit? Like a pillar of fire on the head of every believer to show that every believer now is part of that temple, every believer is part of the household of God, the dwelling place of God, part of that heavenly temple.

So, Zion represents the church in its connection to Jesus who is the final temple and what does the text say? The text speaks of the exaltation of Zion, “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains.” You can see that he’s speaking here in picture language. If you went to Jerusalem and you looked on Mount Zion today, you would realize that Jerusalem and Mount Zion are small and short in comparison to the hills that surround Jerusalem. If you glance northwards towards Lebanon, you would see the great mountains of Lebanon towering in the distance, towering so much higher than little Zion.

And the significance of mountains are these: that throughout the history of the world, ever since Eden, wherever people have been engaged to worship their god or their imagined god, they have done so in the high places. You find this in the Bible, don’t you? The Canaanite religions? They would worship their gods and goddesses in the high places. They were kind of reaching out towards God. That’s why they built this building called Babel in order that they might create their own god and their own future and their own destiny and put their own god at the top of this man-made mountain, as it were. That has rubbed off. Mount Olympus where Zeus and the other gods dwell. Mount Arboz when Chemosh lived or Mount Meru where Lord Brahma lived or Mount Zaphon north of Israel in Syria where the god Baal lived.

When Isaiah, therefore, writes that the day is coming when in the latter days God will establish his mountain above all the other mountains, what he’s saying is this: there will come a day when in the eyes of absolutely every person, whoever they are who has ever

lived, in the eyes of everybody it will be established in the last days that there is no god but God. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus; the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. There is no god but God and that this God exists and he exists alone and that the worship of God will be the only kind of worship there is in the universe on that day. Even those that don't believe in him will believe in him then. Even those who believe in other gods will believe in him then. Their worship will be that of fear and terror but his own people will worship him with joy and gladness. There is coming a day when God will establish Zion; he will establish Zion as the highest of all the mountains.

He began to do that when Jesus came into the world. He began to do that very thing. You remember he quotes from Isaiah 2 in John 12. He uses the same verb, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." Do you see what Jesus is claiming? Here is Isaiah writing of the day when Zion will be exalted and people will be drawn to Zion from all across the world and here is Jesus saying, "Step one of my exaltation is the cross. Step one of my exaltation is to be lifted up on the cross to die for the sins of my people." And that's the beginning, "and then I'll be exalted or I'll be lifted up to glory, to the throne of David, to sit upon that majestic throne of the universe." The exaltation of Jesus starts when he is exalted on a Roman gibbet, dying for our sins and continues after his resurrection as he is raised, lifted up from death and then lifted up into glory so that today our Lord Jesus is where? He is in the immediate presence of God; he is in the Holy of Holies and now, what's happening today? He is drawing men and women to himself.

So, we see the exaltation of Zion and then we see the magnetism of Zion. Again, you can see that this is picture language because he describes at the end of verse 2 a river that flows, a river of people that flows uphill. That's against gravity; that isn't how it happens very often, does it? Except in Scotland because all kinds of wonderful things happen in Scotland including that little tune we were just singing. That wrote that in Glasgow in anticipation of me being born. In the 1700s they were preparing the way for me. Anyway, the Glasgow hymn was good.

Near Glasgow in the west of Scotland, there is what we call the "electric brae." The word "brae," this is your education for today, means "a hill." You know what "electric" means, you've got that word in America. The electric brae is a kind of strange thing because here you are, you're driving along and then suddenly you see a hill coming up so you're ready to put your foot down and if you've got a four in the floor manual car which they have over there because they're behind the times, you gear down in order to go up the hill. Suddenly you find that while you were going up the hill, you can actually switch your car engine off, take your foot off the thing and it glides up the hill. It's the most remarkable thing. Only in Scotland and when you're coming the other way, you come and you think you're going to go down the hill, I mean, all the countryside around you tells you you're going down a hill. You come to this thing and you discover that not only have you got to work on your car and put your foot down and gear down to get up the hill because you're going down the hill. It's a weird thing. Your engine is laboring to get you down this hill. It's the most strange thing. Only in Scotland. And the river looks as if it's flowing uphill. Normally, in normal countries, that doesn't happen. That's just a little glimpse of heaven, of course. Heaven is a local call from there.

So, against all the odds, the picture that he's painting here is the picture of a river of humanity and the river is flowing uphill. In other words, this is the work of God. God is drawing people; he's drawing people out of the nations; he's drawing them towards Zion; he's drawing them towards Jesus; he's drawing them towards his eternal city. Here is the sovereign drawing power of God. Edward Young in his commentary captures this: "How clearly the doctrine of grace is present in this chapter as these people resolve to flow to Zion. They act only because God is drawing them to himself."

He goes on to say in verse 3, "and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'" Here is genuine faith being alerted in the hearts of these people. They want to come. When God draws us, he gives us the desire to come. When God draws people to himself, he gives us faith to come; he gives us a longing to come. And here they come out of all the nations. Do you see? "Many peoples." All the nations of the earth will be blessed, the promise to Abraham said, and here it's beginning to happen, being drawn to Jesus.

This, of course, begins on the day of Pentecost although it's not been fulfilled in its completeness yet. The day of Pentecost, you remember, Luke is concerned to show us that people were there in Jerusalem from every known part of the then known world: Parthians, Medes, residents of Mesopotamia and Judea and Cappadocia and Pontus and Asia and Phrygia and Pamphilia and Egypt and parts of Libya and so on. They are all there: Cretans and Arabs and they're hearing in their own language the mighty works of God. That was the beginning. That was just the beginning.

And why are they in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost? Well, Isaiah tells us in verse 3, "For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." There is Peter standing on Mount Zion in the temple forecourt, here are all these people come to worship in Mount Zion and it's there that they hear the Word of God. It's there that they hear the good news of the gospel for the very first time. And get this, it's still there. No longer in Jerusalem, but in Zion, in the church of God. It's still there that they hear the good news of the gospel and it's still through Zion that the Word of the Lord comes to the whole world. The church is the pillar and ground of truth. God draws people. Do you want to know where truth is to be found? It's only to be found in Zion, the city of our God and in the words that he's given to his church. This is where the truth is to be found and everybody who wants to know about God, as God draws them to himself, must go to Zion, to the church of Jesus Christ.

And this gospel message is to be proclaimed throughout this whole age until the very end of the days. Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come." And in the book of Revelation, we discover what that end will be. We read part of it this morning in our call to worship, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty, just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name for you alone are holy. All nations will come to worship you for your righteous acts have

been revealed. And after this I looked and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened.” What John is describing there is this: when people come to Zion, when they come to God through Jesus Christ, the door of the heavenly sanctuary is opened to them. Whenever we gather together to God Sunday by Sunday and we come to God in Jesus’ name, we’re not only repeating a mantra when we say “in Jesus’ name,” we’re coming to God in Jesus’ name, by his authority and the sanctuary of heaven is opened to us. You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to Jesus, to the innumerable company of angels. You have come to the Spirit of just men and women made perfect. Whenever we come to God, we are part of this great mass of humanity that he is drawing to himself. If we could see with spiritual eyes, it would look like a mountain from a distance as the souls of men and women and boys and girls are focused and drawn upwards, upwards, ever upwards towards where Jesus sits in his heavenly glory this morning. That’s the great business that God is about. Why do we come? We come for the light. We come for the revelation. We come for the truth.

In the book of Revelation, at the very end of history, we see this picture of the church like a spotless bride coming down out of heaven. We see this garden city that is the final temple. We see it and there’s no need of a temple, there’s no need of a sanctuary or worship place because the whole thing is a temple because God is present and God’s people are present with him. And in it’s light will the nations walk and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into that city.

Why do they come? Well, they come, we’re told, that he may “teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” That’s what they want to do; they want learning for living. A friend of mine is on a radio show called “Truth for Life” and a strap line for that radio show is “Where the learning is for living.” I like that. They want to live in the light of what they’ve learned of God; they want transformed living and a renewed lifestyle. They come to Zion because it says, “For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

There is no salvation for anyone in the entire world apart from the one who came to Jerusalem. Jesus said, “Salvation is of the Jews.” He said that to a Samaritan woman. She believed in the first five books of the Old Testament but she didn’t believe the rest. Jesus says, “There is coming a time when you won’t worship in Mount Gerizim and Samaria nor will you even worship in Jerusalem.” There is coming a time when people will only worship in Zion and in Christ who is its King.

But there’s a third thing here: not only the exaltation of Zion and the magnetism of Zion but the peace of Zion. Did you notice that great picture? We live in a world torn by factionalism, a world that has seen so many wars fought for so many reasons, driven by politics or economics or self-interest or tribalism or nationalism and occasionally by religion. We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century people were so optimistic, humanism was optimistic. They believed that at last we had come to see, as a result of evolution, the inherent goodness of man. They believed in the doctrine of the inevitable human progress; the prospect of achieving universal peace. And then the 20<sup>th</sup> century came. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, over 805 million casualties in war. The

atheistic century produced more dead in war than the whole history of the world up to that point. It makes the wars of religion in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century seem like children's playground toys. Eight hundred and five million dead.

We've enjoyed a period of peace with the occasional foray into war. Some of our own members are still out there in the battlefield trying to secure stability and freedom but there is coming a day when he, that is the King, will judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many people. There is coming a day when judgment will be done, when justice will be done, when all the causes of conflict will be resolved. There is coming a day. This is not some millennialistic dream. This will happen when the King comes. When he comes in all his splendor and his glory, he will. He will begin by judging the nations and separating sheep from goats, godly from ungodly, righteous from unrighteous. There will be a just judgment. People will get what they chose. If they did not choose the way of salvation, they will get what they chose. There will be justice done. It will be entirely fair. No one will be able to look the Judge in the face and say, "You didn't treat me right." And there will be justice done for all those who have been treated unjustly, those who have suffered whether emotional or physical abuse will have the tears wiped from their eyes. Those who have had to experience injustice in the court system will have the issue resolved publicly for the whole world to know. Justice will be done and wars will cease.

Isn't it a most amazing picture. We sang about it earlier, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares." When I was a little boy growing up in the public school that I went to, we used to have an assembly every morning and we often sang that hymn we had, the middle one, "Behold the mountain of the Lord in the latter days shall rise." I used to sing that as a little boy. I'd sing the Beatles outside but I'd sing that inside. It moved me then and it moves me still, that there will come a day when there will be a final end to all violence. Do you notice that this is not a human-made program? Only Jesus can do this. Only Jesus can accomplish this at his return and kingdom. "They shall beat their swords to plowshares, their spears to pruning hooks and they will not lift up sword against other nations and they will learn war no more." No more military colleges. No more need to learn how to make war. Finished. Isn't that a great vision?

Isaiah says that's where we're going. That's where history is headed. There will be a transformation of the cosmos, the culture and the world. Isaiah says that's what's going to happen in the latter days, in the final state when the little stone that is released from the mountain one day shatters all the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom grows to its fullness and the day comes when Jesus, with all his people, appears before the watching world and the watching world sees all that he has accomplished in drawing these people to himself.

Isaiah points to that day and he has a little word for the people of his own day. He's going to say some tough stuff so he has a little word of encouragement to them and to us, "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD." What is the light of the Lord? It's the revelation that the Lord gives by his Word. And he's saying to them and he's saying to us, "Live in light of this hope. Let this hope guide you. Let this hope



reassure you. Let this hope comfort you.” Whatever else is happening in the world, when everything that can be shaken is shaken, when the ideologies of people fall apart, when the constraints of the world are taken away and everything falls to pieces, when nations rise and nations fall, hold onto this, let this be the rock on which you stand. Let this be the anchor that keeps you in the midst of the storm. Let this hope, this is where we’re going, this is where history is headed, this is the end of the story for humanity: the mountain of the house of the Lord; Zion, the city of our God; Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. This is the big picture and in light of that big picture, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Not hiding from reality.

Isaiah is going to plunge into reality in the next verse. The reality of a fallen world is a desperate reality but it’s not the end of the story and we need to keep the end of the story before us whatever is happening, whatever is going on. If you’ve ever watched the Lord of the Rings, that trilogy, sit down and try to watch the whole thing. It’s a test of perseverance. If you’ve ever read the book you know it ends well. That’s okay, that’s really good to remember. It’s going to end well, but when you’re in the middle of that trilogy, it’s not looking good. There are times it looks seriously screwed up and you think things are going to fall apart. That’s like the story of our lives; it’s like the story of human history.

But Isaiah writes this to you and me this morning and he says, “Keep your eye on the prize. Jesus is going to make it all right in the end.”

Let’s pray.

*Father, we thank you that in the midst of all the trials and troubles of life, the terrible motivations and actions of human beings that the great plan is that already you are building. This mountain is growing slowly of people who are flocking to the hill of the Lord, who are learning the Word of the Lord, who are connecting with him who is our holy place, the Lord Jesus. Living stones are being built into a spiritual house for God and this slow work is going on and one day will be revealed in all its power before the eyes of a watching world. We pray that today somebody is here who has not connected yet with Jesus, that they would connect with him today and that all of us, Lord, would grow in our appreciation for this great hope that you’ve held out to us in Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.*