

Introduction:

A. *Illus.*: I called Bryan this week. Long ago, he was in our youth group in Pennsylvania. A real pistol! The kind of kid that could make a youth pastor consider a career change. But time has passed. I've seen on Facebook that Bryan has been suffering from three tidal waves of incurable cancer. I just felt like I should call him. He was astonished. He knows that death is coming within a year or two at best. Among other things, we talked about heaven. He'd thought about it a lot, but he told me that it had been harder for him this time around to get a bead on heaven, harder to know what to think, harder to draw comfort from it. I hope I can share this week's sermon with him.

B. We don't have to be desperately ill to be desperately tired of the dark all around us. *Illus.*: I give my *Tribune* to Jill when she comes into Einsteins. "Anything good," she always asks. "Nothing," I reply. And when she leaves, she says, "You're right. Nothing." *Illus.*: Last night we sat out on the beautiful lawn at Ravinia for a musical retrospective of the great Leonard Bernstein, narrated by his daughter. She said he sometimes despaired of this world and then would rally to compose some beautiful hope.

*There's a time for us,
Some day a time for us,
Time together with time spare,
Time to learn, time to care,
Some day!*

Those words are nothing but a pipe dream except for the people of God.

C. **Turn to Is. 60.** For six weeks we're studying Isaiah 59-62, the heart of this great book of prophecy, a book quoted,

paraphrased, or alluded to over 400 times in the NT. Isaiah gave Israel, who faced some very dark days indeed, a vision of hope in the form of a powerful poem.

- D. **Turn to Is. 60.** It is very important to remember that these chapters are Hebrew poetry. Poetry then and now doesn't work the same way as prose. Like all great poets, Isaiah used analogies, metaphors, and hyperbole to reveal truth to us that cannot be literally described. For example, our text today will talk about "the ships of Tarshish" coming to God's city. Our belief that the Bible is without error does not mean we must envision actual ships from wherever Tarshish was. **Isaiah means more than that.** So when we read these chapters, remember that there is *more* happening than a literal description. **Not less than literal; more.**
- E. So before we hear Is.60 we have to put ourselves in the "deep, down dark" where Israel found themselves. The sinister night of a dark, dead culture. You and other sightless citizens feel your way in the darkness, moaning like doves, growling like bears, anxious, hopeless. Then, a shout! The prophet raises his voice somewhere out ahead of you: *ARISE!... SHINE!... For your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.* Suddenly the darkness crumbles around you like the walls of Jericho. Shadows flee away. The gray-faced walking dead stream out wide-eyed into other-worldly glory. Not blinding like the sun but the very "*glory of the LORD,*" weighty and wondrous, which is dawning upon them.
- F. The prophet gathers these glory gawkers around him to explain: "For see, darkness covers the earth..." and they look beyond the boundaries of their city and see that horrid night. "*And thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you—YOU!*" It's more than they can take

in. It's too wonderful. Like a sparkling spring dawn upon a people who have never know anything but the darkness and chill of underground caverns. *This is the LORD God himself whose glory dawns on you! He is no longer far from you, no longer angry with you. This isn't just his light. He has come to you and the glorious light is proof.*

Then, pointing out into *thick darkness* where whole nations lie shrouded, the prophet raises his voice again, with a great exulting laugh, "*Nations will come to your light!*" They had been mocked among the nations. Can you see them looking at one another in wonder? The prophet shouts again: "*Hah! Kings will come to the brightness of your dawn!*"

- G. "*Lift up your eyes and look about you!*" So they do, and off on the dark horizon, they see people gathering—vast numbers, innumerable specks on the far-off hills. He shouts again, "*All assemble and come to you! To you!*" They look closer. "*Look! Your sons are coming home from far away, and your daughters carried like little ones.*" Those once exiled, those born in far off lands, those dispersed throughout the world. **Now they were coming back; all the descendants of Abraham finally coming home!**

"*Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy.*" They look out to the horizon and see the lost sons and daughters of Israel finally coming home. Thousands of them; too many to count! Then they look out to the seas where flotillas of ships come toward them and again their eyes grow big! The prophet laughs again and proclaims, "*the wealth of the seas will be brought to you, to you—YOU—the riches of the nations will come.*" To Israel? Why, they're practically beggars. They've got no immigration problem because no one wants

to come to *them*. No one camps at their border! But now this! It is an amazing sight! They look off to the south and to the east

*Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.*

Midian?? The violent armies of Midian once decimated Israel and now they come to worship!

*And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.*

Once the Queen of Sheba bringing treasure to Solomon, now her descendants bring treasures, bearing God's praises like *evangelists*.

*All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you,
the rams of Nebaioth will serve you;
they will be accepted as offerings on my altar,
and I will adorn my glorious temple.*

Vast flocks of sheep streaming toward the Holy City to be the glad offerings of these faraway peoples to the LORD, the God of the nations. All these treasures beautifying God's bright temple. "What does this all mean?" they wonder!

H. Again the prophet points out to the western horizon,

*"Who are these that fly along like clouds,
like doves to their nests?
Surely the islands look to me;
in the lead are the ships of Tarshish,
bringing your children from afar,
with their silver and gold,
to the honor of the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.*

They are coming so fast, hurrying like the homeward bound from the remotest islands of the seven seas. A vast fleet of ships, their rails crowded with the eager faces of the children of Israel, all who are born again through faith as true as Abraham's. Their ships ride low on the waves, heavy with treasures of silver and gold, all brought gladly as tribute to the LORD, Yahweh, the God of Israel. Think of it! These peoples all had other gods, other religions, but here they come sailing out of the darkness to the light of the Holy One of Israel. Because the Holy One has *endowed his people* with such splendor that other gods are forgotten, left to rot in crumbling temples. **Only the LORD God remains.**

- I. The people of Israel look in amazement at their prophet. Can this really happen! Could this really be our future? *There's more*, he says. *"Foreigners will rebuild your walls."* In fact, these spiritual immigrants will *be* part of the walls, *"being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit"* [Eph 2:22] *"And their kings will serve you."* O Israel, you will spend countless generations under the thumb and whip of one tyrant or another, but it will not always be so. **Your destiny is that kings will serve you.**
- J. *"Though in anger I struck you"* – yes, these people have known the heavy hand of God's judgment, to be sure, but now, *"in favor (in grace) I will show you compassion."* The heart of God goes out to you!
- K. Jerusalem has been made new, as has all creation. New heavens and new earth, and at the center of it all is the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. Heaven has come down to earth. God's kingdom no longer has enemies so, the prophet says, *"Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night..."* not simply because there is no danger to lock out, but...

so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations— their kings led in triumphal procession.

For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.

- L. It's a breathtaking sight! Stunning. One moment, deepest darkness, and the next the people of God rise, as from the dead, radiant with the light of the LORD who has come to them! And that's not the half of it! But it is enough for us to take in today. Now, let's think for just a few minutes about what we've seen. As I do so, I'm indebted to the insights in a little book by Richard Mouw, entitled, *When the Kings Come Marching In*.

I. ALL THE TREASURES OF WORLD WILL BE BROUGHT INTO GOD'S HOLY CITY

- A. You saw some of the treasures: "*the wealth of the seas and the riches of the nations,*" vast herds and flocks, silver, gold, and incense, rich woods. The real miracle is not that these rich gifts are brought to the new Jerusalem, but that they've been... well, *redeemed*, you might say. These *commodities* have motivated wars, and have been the deadly pride of the rich and arrogant. **Rev. 18** describes the fall of Babylon—the symbolic city of all that's wrong with the world. Listen:

"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore—cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil,

of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.”

- B. But once the corrupt and corrupting systems of this evil world are destroyed, the treasures of the world will be brought into God’s beautiful city... because *“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it”* [Ps 24:1]. **It would be highway robbery to deprive God’s kingdom of all the beautiful things he has made, and all that his servants craft from those things.** Do you remember when the Israelites were freed from Egypt how they *“asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing,”* and the Egyptians gave them all that. *“So they plundered the Egyptians,”* Exodus says. And those were the materials that eventually went into the building of God’s tabernacle. So it will be again.
- C. God told Adam and Eve to “fill the earth and subdue it,” but that cultural mandate was never properly fulfilled. Mankind has dominated the creation but never to the glory of God. But here, we see how that will happen. All the treasures of the earth—and all the beautiful and useful products that mankind can make of those treasures—will all be brought into God’s vast and holy kingdom.

II. KINGS WILL BE “LED IN TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION” INTO GOD’S HOLY CITY

- A. Kings are mentioned three times in this chapter.
- **V.3**, *“Nations will come to your light, and **kings** to the brightness of your dawn.”*
 - **V.10**, *“Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their **kings** will serve you.”*
 - **V.11**, *“Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that people may bring*

you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession.”

Generally, in Isaiah, the kings of the nations are bad—the oppressors of Israel and enemies of God. But here they are part of a great procession into the Holy City, drawn by the glory of God in his people. Did you notice this: “*their kings are led in triumphal procession*”? They are not at the head of the column. They come as the conquered. Dr. Mouw suggests they might be brought in to stand before their sainted victims, a final reckoning, the final re-orienting of the political power of the world to Christ. But listen to John’s parallel vision to Isaiah’s in **Rev. 21:23-27...**

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

- B. For one thing, these kings represent—poetically, perhaps—all the world’s kingdoms coming under the authority of God *and* coming to the service of God’s people.
- C. The kings, presidents, premiers and dear leaders of this world now simply could not bear up under the holy glory of God’s presence in the Holy City. But I think what is envisioned here is the fruit of Christ’s 1000-year reign on earth, when after his return he reigns and brings all things—including all the nations—under his control.
- D. Where Isaiah pictures a military victory where “*their kings are led in triumphal procession,*” John sees that same scene

infused with God’s grace. **Greg Beale** writes, “*They are bringing not literal riches but themselves as worshipers before God’s end-time presence.*” **Grant Osborne** sums up, “[John] evidently wishes to emphasize how God’s mercy ultimately triumphs over evil and has redeemed some even from among ‘the kings of the earth.’” [both in Osborne, *Revelation*, p.763]

Imagine what it will mean for faithful believers—especially the long-despised, Christ-converted Jews among them—seeing the kings of the earth coming to bring worship and tribute to the Lord our God, coming as the representatives of their nations to lay the keys of their cities, as it were, before the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And that is something *we* shall see!

That brings us to one more striking aspect to this new homeland: “*Nations will come to your light.*”

III. NATIONS WILL COME TO THE LIGHT OF THE LORD AND HIS PEOPLE IN THE HOLY CITY

- A. God promised Abraham, “*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” That blessing would eventually and *only* come through Jesus Christ.
- B. John the Revelator gave us glorious glimpses of the future including this: “*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’*”

From that picture we sometimes think that heaven will be an eternity of standing and shouting praise. There’s no

doubt that worshiping God will be our first nature then. All we think and do and say will be lyrical with worship. But don't let the blood-bleached white robes suggest that everyone will be indistinguishable from one another then.

- C. Part of the glory of heaven will be glory of all the nations brought into one wonderful kingdom. “*Every nation, tribe, people and language.*” We will not be a homogenized nation then, all alike. **Is 60 celebrates the glories of *different* peoples, all the redeemed of the earth, coming into God's presence adopted and enfolded into the people of God.**

Illus.: One of the highlights of my life was attending a Naturalization Ceremony at the Federal Courthouse in Chicago. A Mexican friend was becoming a U.S. citizen. That morning alone, 130 people from over 30 countries became citizens. It was so moving looking at those faces, all reflecting different nationalities, but now excitedly becoming Americans. After they pronounced their oath of loyalty, we all turned—judge, bailiff, new citizens and old—and pledged our allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. It was thrilling.

But how much more to live in a bright kingdom, surrounded by lovers of Jesus from every nation, from countless generations, who all bring their singing and dancing, their thinking and creativity, their Christlike character and boundless love for one another, all to this vast city.

I suppose we cannot help but think of a city in terms of buildings and streets, but the Bible portrays our City more like a garden; actually, more like a Bride. The angel told John, “*Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.... And he showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem,*

coming down out of heave from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel...” [Rev 219-10] This city will not be characterized by its architecture but by her people, each and all a radiant tribute to the glorious Light of the Lord, shed on us through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And that, my dear brother Bryan, is the city that is awaiting you.
That is our homeland.