

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: In his book, *Leaving Home*, Garrison Keillor tells a fictional story about a family from Lake Wobegon, MN. Grace Tollefson married Alex Campbell, who turned out to be a ne'er-do-well. They had three kids, Earl, Marlys and Walter. Then he left her, penniless, and she was forced to move back home and live off the charity of folks there. She endured the relentless *I-told-you-sos* of her mother. It was humiliating. Then, "*One day they got a letter from a man in Philadelphia doing research on Scottish nobility, who asked who their ancestors were so he could look it up.*" Grace wrote back and a few days later another later came.

She opened the envelope. It was addressed to Mrs. Grace Campbell, but the letter was addressed to "Your Royal Highness." He wrote: "Today is the happiest day of my life as I greet my one true Sovereign Queen." And went on to say that their branch of the Campbell family was first in the line of succession of the House of Stewart, the Royal Family of Scotland.

Another letter soon came with a complicated genealogical chart with a line in the corner leading "*right straight to them: Earl, Marlys, and Walter. The Royal Family of Scotland living in Lake Wobegon in a green mobile home, furniture donated by the Lutheran church.*"

They were astounded beyond words. Disbelieving at first, afraid to put their weight on something so beautiful, afraid it was too good to be true, and then it took hold—this was grace, pure grace that God offered them. Not their will but His. Grace. Here they were in their same dismal place but everything had changed. They were different people. Their surroundings were the same, but they were different..."

Ultimately, years later, the youngest son, Walter, finds out the whole business was a fraud, but he never tells his mother or siblings because thinking you are royalty, whether anyone else knows it or not, changes a person. At the end of the story, Grace is old, and she says to her son, *“Oh, Walter, what would I do without you? You’re so strong. You’re so good to me. You’re a prince, you know. They can put a crown on a dog and call it a prince, but you are a prince through and through. They may not know it now, but they’ll know it soon. Next year we’ll be in Edinburgh with the bands playing and the flags flying and the crowds cheering.”* [*Leaving Home*, “The Royal Family”, p.140-141, 145]

- B. God did something like that for Israel 700 years before Christ. The years, the centuries, ahead would be dark and humbling because of their sin, but God didn’t want them to forget who they were or what would become of his people, so he sent them a message promising a royal homecoming.
- Today we look back at those people of Israel from our high vantage point of knowing Jesus Christ.** But we identify with them also, because we, too, are out of place in this world. We are a people without a homeland here, a people of no account to the nations around us. Thanks to Christ, we have been grafted into Israel’s great vine and we enjoy the high privileges of the God-blessed life now but we also yearn for the day when we are no longer put-upon pilgrims but are finally home. I’ve long felt that part of my job as a pastor is to make you homesick. So turn to **Is. 62.**
- C. We’ve taken six Sundays to study the very heart of the magisterial book of Isaiah, chapters 59-62. Chap. 61, which we’ve studied the last two Sundays, was the commission of Christ Jesus. At the end of that chapter, **vv.10-11** put these words on the lips of the coming Messiah:

*I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.*

How will the Sovereign LORD do that? Listen to 62:1-7...

I. OUR LORD WILL NOT REST TILL HIS PEOPLE ARE THE PRAISE OF THE WHOLE EARTH (62:1-7)

- A. I think it is the Messiah himself who continues speaking here. When he speaks of Zion and Jerusalem he is not speaking primarily of the *place* but of God's *people*. Remember the Messiah's commission in ch.61:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor. ...
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...*

That was just the beginning of the Messiah's work.

- B. These verses tell us what he is doing now, v.1:

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication [her God-given righteousness]
shines out like the dawn,
her salvation [also God-given] like a blazing torch.*

Those whom Christ has saved and made righteous are ignored or despised in this world. Christ is promising here that it will not always be so. He is constantly working for

the day we are revealed to the world as the royal bride we are. When Christ's work is done the world will one day see us the way people see the dawn or a torch carried out of the dark. Incredibly, it will be our *righteousness*, our *salvation*, that makes us shine so brightly to the world.

- C. **Vv.2-4...** What vindication and glory will the nations and the kings see? When they look to see our King's crown there in his hand they will see *us*! We whom the Messiah has rescued and restored are the LORD's crowning achievement. As **Alec Motyer** put it, "*The Lord's people will be the sign that he is king.*"

One day God's beloved bride will be known throughout the world by the endearing names he gives her. Remember who God's people were when Isaiah spoke these words. They were rebels and renegades. They were a filthy disgrace to God, and he had cut them off. They were spiritual adulterers, prostituting themselves to other gods. And Gentiles like us, of course, were even worse! So this is amazing! They had been rightly named 'Deserted by God.' Their ravaged land was rightly named 'Desolate' because it no longer flowed with milk and honey. But they will have new God-given names and identities: Hephzibah —*She Is My Delight*, and Beulah—*Married*. Married to the Lord! You know some Christians call heaven Beulah Land, the honeymoon home where God and his Bride will live.

- D. Christ promises a marriage made in heaven. **V.5...** It is something of a stretch for us to imagine God rejoicing over us as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. We imagine him a little too austere for such excitement, too reserved. But the Lord is captivated and delighted by his bride's beauty and grace. *Illus.:* When I read that I thought of pictures I saw of Billy and Aislinn's wedding in June. That's joy!

The Lord Jesus gladly tells us that he will feel like that on the day of his wedding touts. In **Zeph 3:17** God tells his beloved people that he “*will rejoice over you with singing.*” Just like lovers do! “*You are so beautiful... to me.*”

- E. In vv.6-7 we return again to where we started—the waiting... Watchmen typically guard a city from danger but these sentinels are high on the walls so that they can *call on the LORD*. **In other words, they’re praying that God would hurry up!** They’re assigned by the Messiah to *pester* God—to *importune* him. “*How long, O Lord?*” “*How long?*” “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” “*Come soon!*” We are to be those watchmen, calling out to God night and day to hasten our wedding day. “*How long? Today? Come soon!*”

Most brides and grooms know the exact number of days till their wedding. But we don’t. So we wait on tiptoes.

Illus.: Some of you remember **Paul Moldenhauer**, who was part of our church some years ago. He was single for a long time. So I was surprised when I saw a wedding picture on Facebook. But it was the story that was the real surprise:

Our wedding was a surprise ceremony held halfway through a regular Sunday morning church service, with our only guests being whoever came to church that morning! After our pastor delivered a perfectly fitting sermon on the ultimate model of marriage — the union between Christ and the Church — the center aisle was decorated while special music was performed. Kami and I then entered the sanctuary as the processional began. We loved our unconventional wedding, which was full of the deepest meaning for me on the most blessed day of my life!

That's the kind of wedding God has planned for us and our Messiah! No one knows the date, but one day, in the midst of our worshiping lives, the watchmen's prayers will be answered and our Bridegroom will come for us!

Now the tone shifts. You can hum, "*Goin' to the Chapel,*" while I read **vv.8-12...**

II. OUR LORD IS ARRANGING THE GRAND OPENING OF OUR HOLY CITY (62:8-12)

- A. To begin with, God's people and city will be absolutely secure, once and for all. Remember when, after Adam and Eve sinned, God told Adam that the ground would be cursed and raising food would be "*painful toil,*" made harder by "*thorns and thistles.*" In our new city we will evidently still work, but it will not be *cursed* work. **Our work will be fruitful, as joyful a task as singing.** The LORD himself will join us for this everlasting feast. In **Is 25:6-7** the prophet promised:

*On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.*

So here, the stage is set for a feast!

- B. **V.10 reminds me of a huge grand opening.** Jesus told his disciples that he was going away to prepare a place for us. Here his preparations are complete. Gates that have been closed are now flung wide. The highway coming into the city has been smoothed and paved so that nothing hinders the glory-bound pilgrims, these glad captives of grace. And above it all is a great banner—the cross of Jesus Christ—welcoming home all who have trusted in him!

- C. Not only is there a great banner guiding God's people home, but there is also a proclamation from the LORD himself. In the Hebrew of v.11, the word *Look!* appears three times.

Look! ["Hear ye! Hear ye!] *The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth:*

I imagine heralds in red coats with gold braid and buttons, putting long herald trumpets to their lips so that everyone listens. They are sent out over the whole earth to proclaim that the Savior is coming. On the way out into the world this morning, perhaps we should fit you with a herald's coat and give you trumpets and scrolls.

"Say to Daughter Zion, 'Look! your Savior comes!

We are only the Lord's bride because he is our Savior.

Think where we would be without our Savior! Unloved ragamuffins, beggars, orphans, working the streets. But instead we are the bride of the King of kings! In our weddings the bride comes last, but in the wedding to come our Bridegroom makes his grand entrance last. No matter how wonderful the New Jerusalem is, it wouldn't be home if Jesus wasn't there! This is his true triumphal entry.

Look again! *"Look! His reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him."* That means he has both a God-given reward for his saving work and the wage he has earned. Are you looking for a chest of gold or garlands of diamonds? Oh no! For rushing out to meet him are his beloved people, his bride. *We* are the Savior's reward. *We* are all the payment he ever wanted.

- D. Once again, we are told four more of our names, none of which would have been true without our Savior.

"They will be called the Holy People." Once we Gentiles were not a people at all and the people of Israel

had become an *unholy* people, as far from God as they could be. But now here is a people as holy as God himself, thanks to Jesus who made us a holy bride, *“cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”* [Eph 5:26-27]

We will also be called, “the Redeemed of the LORD.”

Once we were owned by another, captive to debts we could never repay. But Jesus paid for us with his own blood, rescuing us from dehumanizing slavery in this world and the pit of hell in the next, securing for us a freedom we will never lose. *“Redeemed! How I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb!”*

“And you will be called Sought After” because we didn’t find the Lord. He found us. We weren’t even looking. He pursued us when we had no love for him at all; in fact, when many of us wanted nothing at all to do with him. As the hymn says, *“Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God; He, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.”*

“You will be called... the City No Longer Deserted.”

Once, God abandoned Israel’s temple and city, disgusted and offended by their wickedness. And they didn’t even miss him! But in his Revelation John says:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his

people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

So:

- **Do not forget who we are!** In this dark world, we are God's people. Even better, we are Christ's beloved bride. Thanks to him we are *God's Delight, Married, the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; Sought After, and the City No Longer Deserted.*
- **Do not forget that this world is not our home.** Don't get too comfortable. Don't sink your roots too deeply. Soon the gates will be flung open. Live *here* as people whose home is *there*.
- **Do not forget that our day is coming, a grand homecoming befitting the bride of the Lord Jesus.** So watch and pray.
- **Do not forget our debt of love to our Lord Jesus Christ!**
Illus.: You often see up on our screens the calligraphy of Timothy Botts. A couple of days ago he posted this image of the words, *Jesus Christ*, along with this story: "*When Nancy's cousin visited Tanzania, he was received with warm hospitality. He inquired as to why he was treated this way after so much history of American and European domination, slavery and stealing of resources. The African's reply: because you gave us Jesus Christ.*

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were in their same dismal place but everything had changed. They were different people. Their surroundings were the same, but they were different...”