

In All the Earth

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- [0 : 00] I am not mad at you. You probably knew that. But I find myself having to say that a lot. I hadn't planned on saying this. It's because I wrestle with something called BRF syndrome. I don't know if you know what that is. You can look it up later. It has something to do with my resting face.
- Also, at times I can get pretty dour and sarcastic. And that's a fault of mine. It's a sin, really. And the core group leaders experienced this a couple months ago.
- Somebody asked me after a meeting with the core group leaders, were you angry or sad or what? I'm like, no, it was great. It was fine. But core group leaders, I apologize to you.
- You need more than just that. You need my encouragement. I really love you guys and all you do. But I'm not mad at you either. Has anybody ever said, I'm not mad at you, and that came as a big relief?
- [1 : 03] I think that's true for most of us, right? Especially when they say, I'm not mad at you anymore. I remember very distinctly a friend of mine saying that to me.
- I was leading rehearsal. This was about 12 years ago. And I snapped at him. And I didn't apologize afterwards. And then I just let it go. And it completely crushed him.
- And over time, he removed himself from me and contacted with me. And I gradually noticed it. But by the time I really realized it, it felt like it was too late.
- And I was really embarrassed by it. And afraid, actually. And I just hoped the whole thing would resolve itself on its own. But surprise, it did not.
- It remained bad. And it got worse. And I finally had to humble myself. And I went to his house. And I asked for his forgiveness. And he explained how he had been hurt.
- [2 : 02] And he was right and was justified. But then he said, Dan, I forgive you. Completely. It's as if it never happened. And it made me want to tell others about it, too.
- I went and told my wife. I told my friends. Like, look at this guy. He just forgave me for this. Just like that. It was amazing. And now I'm telling you about it. Now, what if the person mad at you was not your friend, but somebody in a position of power or influence?
- An elected official, a judge, the president, the king. Or how about the creator of the universe? What if it was God that was mad at you? This is the position that the nation of Judah finds itself in, in Isaiah chapter 12.
- It's the first text that we read tonight. The nation of Judah is going to learn that God's not angry anymore. And we're going to see that the removal of that wrath, or as theologians put it, the expiation of that wrath, brings four things.
- It brings repentance. It brings trust. It brings joy. And it brings mission. But you know where we're going, right?
- [3 : 25] I mean, ultimately, we're not talking about Judah. We're talking about us. I'm talking about you. Some of you have walked into this room tonight not quite sure of what God thinks of you.

Some of you, when you walked into the room, think that God is angry with you. Or he's displeased. Or that he has a frown on his face. Or maybe he was okay when you walked in, but who knows what he'll be like tomorrow, the next time you screw up.

Some of you know how you screw up over and over, and you wonder, really, how can God love a person like me? Now, how do I know this about you or us? And it's because half the people that come into my office, half the people that I counsel, wrestle with this specific point.

They're unsure about this point, that God loves them and likes them. And is completely pleased with them. This is not a rebuke for them or for you.

This is going to be an invitation to receive the affection that God is already lavishing on you. Now, some of you feel pretty confident that God likes you, but for some reason that doesn't make much of a difference.

[4 : 44] Like, you wonder, where's the joy that I used to experience? Or the confidence I used to know? Friends, I'm here to tell you that if you're in Christ, God loves you.

He likes you. He's crazy about you. He really wants you to know that. So let's pray and ask him for help, okay? God, give us the power, together with all your holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is your love.

For our good and for your glory. Amen. So let's take first a look at where we are in the Bible. We're in the book of Isaiah.

The prophet Isaiah lived and worked in the nation of Judah during the 8th and 7th centuries BC. He began working during the reign of Ahaz. Ahaz was a pretty despicable king.

And he led his people into some detestable practices. He shuttered up the temple. He set up altars all over the country to worship other gods, pagan gods. He even performed child sacrifices.

[5 : 57] He burned his own sons to pagan gods as an offering. During his reign, Judah was attacked on all sides. And instead of going to God for help, he pledged allegiance to Judah's biggest enemy, the kingdom of Assyria.

And so God, through the prophet, speaks judgment on Ahaz and the kingdom of Judah. Now this is chapter 6 through 12 that I'm talking about.

Now, as bad as it is, because God is compassionate and he's merciful, God continually promises restoration and hope in the midst of all these judgments.

And if you've been attending church for several years, you may remember some of those promises. We hear them during the season of Advent every year. This promise is centered on a future king, one who would be called a wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

The promises also describe a profound future peace that the king brings, a peace which you also hear about during Advent, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and the little child shall lead them.

[7 : 16] Does that sound familiar? That's Isaiah 11. So after pronouncements of judgment and deliverance, judgment and deliverance, we arrive at chapter 12.

And verse 1 says, you will say in that day, and here the word you is singular. So we often hear and read in the Bible ourselves being addressed as you.

Usually it's in you plural, right? God or the writers of Scripture are addressing you as a church. But here's you singular. So you are as free to be as individualistic with this verse as you'd like.

You will say on that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away that you might comfort me.

So where does that anger come from? Well, it comes in a very different place. It comes from a very different place than, say, human anger would come.

[8 : 20] See, when Isaiah is writing and speaking, he's very concerned about the holiness of God. He uses a title for God, the Holy One of Israel, 25 times.

In the rest of the whole Old Testament, you only find that seven times. And in the beginning of this section, in chapter 6, Isaiah describes a vision he had of God, a king seated on a throne, surrounded by burning angels, seraphim and cheraphim.

And they're crying out, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of his glory. God is so holy that Isaiah can't even describe him.

All he can describe is the hem of his robe. And this is because holiness means profoundly pure, profoundly separate, other.

This holiness constitutes an awesome threat to an unworthy, careless, rejecting, and unresponsive people.

[9 : 25] How does one assuage anger like that? One doesn't. One doesn't. It's the choice of God to forgive and to comfort.

The rest of the book of Isaiah fleshes that out. But this God goes to great lengths to deal with sin, to reclaim the sinner, to create a righteous people for himself.

How does he do this? Well, I think we need to trace through Scripture how God deals with sin. Okay? We go to the book of Leviticus, chapter 17, and it says, For the life of a creature is in the blood.

And God says, I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. The New Testament agrees with this.

In Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 22, which says, Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

[10 : 35] So a question to ask might be, well, if that's true, then how many sacrifices must be made? I mean, must I keep offering sacrifices for every little sin that I do?

And that's a great question. And one of the prophets actually asks that question himself. The prophet Micah, he asks this, with what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?

See, already that system doesn't seem to be making sense to him. Right. Because it's pointing towards something else. God goes to great lengths to solve this dilemma. He himself became the perfect sacrifice once for all through the death of his firstborn son, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews chapter 10 says, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God for by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

[11 : 54] So it's done. Sin is faced once for all and then is cast by the grace of God into the depths of the sea.

And now we are at one with Christ. we are now brought into union with God's own son. We share life with him. And when God sees us, he sees his son on whom since eternity past, he has lavished love, affection, praise, and intimacy.

And now we get all of that. Who wouldn't want that? Who wouldn't want the love of a father? The affection of a father? The praise of a father?

Intimacy with the father? As Charles Spurgeon said, God is so boundlessly pleased with Jesus that in him, God is altogether well pleased with us.

A catechism is a method of teaching through question and answer. And there's one called the Heidelberg Catechism.

[13 : 18] It summarizes everything we've just talked about by asking, how are you right with God? You know, I put this in the slides. It's after all the scripture readings. Is it up there? Great. Let's answer this together.

Church, how are you right with God? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ, even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.

All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart. That's it. That's all. Believe. Friends, believe. It makes the world of difference.

Believe. Your Father loves you. He's so crazy about you. He wants to pour affection. Just receive it. Just receive it. What happens when we accept this gift?

What happens when we are made right with God? Well, a lot. But four things that we'll look at tonight. Four things that we find here in Isaiah chapter 12.

[14 : 47] The first is repentance. A regular turning away from sin. And this is very important. And it's not explicit here in the passage, but it's strongly implicit.

Because this is how Old Testament prophecies work. Old Testament prophecies are usually judgment or they're, excuse me, they're judgment or they're blessing.

They're, yes. Somebody help me out. Now, most of the time, there were contingencies on these judgments or promises.

If God pronounced judgment on a nation and the nation repents, he would relent. If God declared that a nation would prosper, but the nation became wicked, he would relent of the good that he had intended for that nation.

And so this is why, during the season of Advent, repentance is emphasized. We push repentance to a place of honor at the table in our worship together.

[15 : 53] Waiting for God's deliverance has always been accompanied by repentance. Here's the key for us as the church. If we are in Christ, we will repent. Because as Christians, being in Christ, it's in our DNA.

He tells us he will give us his Holy Spirit, that he will write his law on our hearts. But when we are made right with God, we will live lives of repentance.

So second, we learn to trust God alone. So first is repentance, second is trust. Verse two says, Behold, God is my salvation.

I will trust and will not be afraid. For the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he's become my salvation. Now remember, when Judah ran into trouble, Judah sought help not from God, but from the kingdom of Assyria.

It didn't work out for Judah. Judah would remain a puppet state of a greater power until the end of its existence. The consequences of trusting anyone or anything besides God are always disastrous.

[17 : 05] Yet we're always drawn to trust something besides God for comfort, for a meaning, for feeling alive. For us, those things tend to be power or money or order or achievement.

For instance, not long before the film director, Sidney Pollack, died, there was an article written about his inability to slow down and enjoy his final years with his loved ones.

Though he was unwell and the grueling process of filmmaking was wearing him down, he couldn't justify his existence if he stopped. He explained, every time I finish a picture, I feel like I've done something I'm supposed to do in the sense that I've earned my stay here on earth for yet another year.

And then it would start all over again. Make a film, work hard, achieve, earn another year on earth until he died. Now I think a lot of us can relate to that, right?

Some of us, we derive our sense of worth in feeling right about a cause. And you see that one all the time nowadays, right? It's not enough to have a certain value, but in a perverse way, we're comforted from being outraged when that value is transgressed.

[18 : 20] Feeling right makes us feel righteous. But for those on whom God has lavished his approval and affection, God's approval is enough. We don't have to feel right.

We don't even have to be right. We don't have to chase something else for comfort, for meaning, for contentment. The third thing happens when we are made right with God is joy.

Joy is the evidence of having been reconciled with our Holy Father. In verse 3, Isaiah writes, with joy you will draw water from the well's salvation.

Now here he shifts to the second person plural. First it was singular, now it's plural. There's a joy that happens when we gather together as God's reconciled people and declare the stories of how God has rescued us and redeemed us.

And you know this, especially if you were here two weeks ago and saw the baptisms, right? Who here either wept or almost wept when Ali was baptized two weeks ago, right?

[19 : 25] To see the water pour down from his head, down his face, and onto his very stylish shirt. Who didn't get the chills to hear Ali declared our brother and to see those babies marked as God's own children?

There's a joy that's infectious when we gather together to declare the praises of the one who has saved us. This is why the writer of the Hebrews tells us, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

So repentance, trust, joy, and fourthly, that's a word, right? Fourthly, fourthly, mission. Come as a result of being made right with God.

Verse four says, and you will say in that day, give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted, sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously.

Let this be made known in all the earth. Shout and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. experiencing the radical, extravagant love of Christ compels to share it with the world.

[20 : 56] We do this all the time, right, when we find things beautiful. A piece of music, a movie, a sunset, a poem, a vista, a book, an insane goal by Lionel Messi.

We want to praise it and we want to share that with others, right? We experience this every week in our worship. God gathers us in.

We declare his praises. He feeds us with his own word and his own self. And then he sends us out. What do we hear right before we leave?

Let us, anybody know? Let us go forth into the, yes, let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks, Annika. How can we declare God's names to peoples of the earth? How can we make that proclamation global as Isaiah suggests? Well, for some of us it might mean going overseas, right?

[21 : 57] But I think for most of us it doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean we go overseas and share the gospel in a different language. but we can still support and strengthen national churches that are preaching the gospel.

I think it's really important now more than ever. Personally, our family has a deep heart for Europe. We've long loved Europe and it used to be that the church focused a lot of its efforts on the Middle East and on Asia.

But now people from those lands are moving to Europe. Now they're being forced to move to Europe. And the opportunity to preach the gospel to them is greater than it's ever been before.

So another thing you can do and this is what my family did and this is we moved to Washington, D.C. You're already here and you can stay.

You can stay in D.C. Stay here. Join a core group. Love the city long term. Work for its prosperity long term. The nations are here in Washington, D.C.

[23 : 04] The opportunities here are boundless. This is why we came. This is why we love D.C. And why we love to be a part of this church. So, let's review.

Because we've been reconciled with God. We repent. We have trust. We have joy. We're sent on mission.

There was a sci-fi TV show back in 2002 called Firefly. It was canceled after only 14 episodes fueling the ire from those fans that believed it to be the best TV show of all time.

Not necessarily one of those persons. Now, realizing an opportunity, this show was made into a motion picture and it was called Serenity and geeks everywhere rejoiced.

Now, some of these passionate fans call themselves brown coats. I won't bore you with the details from the show explaining why they call themselves this but needless to say they wore brown coats.

[24 : 19] the premiere came and on opening night all over the country the brown coats came out. And they didn't just go to see the movie.

They bought extra tickets. They would walk around the mall in their brown coats and they would pass out tickets to strangers. This was their enthusiasm for this film.

How much more? How so much more? I'm not trying to reduce the story of redemption to a sci-fi film. How much more should we tell others about what we've received?

Right? What we've experienced in Christ. A story. A beautiful story. The story of God redeeming and reconciling the world to himself.

This God gives us clothes to wear the robes of righteousness that belong to his own son. And in Christ God delights in us and lavishes us with love and calls us his beloved sons and daughters.

[25 : 32] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Let's pray. Father, what a joy to know that you have forever forgotten our sins cast them forever deep into the ocean.

You will never deal with us according to our sins or reward us according to our iniquities. For on the cross you dealt with Jesus according to our sins and rewarded him according to our iniquities.

Father, thank you for such a lavish salvation. Rescue us in those delusional moments when we forget your forgetfulness. When we begin acting as though Jesus' sacrifice for our sins wasn't enough.

When we think there's something more we can do to gain your acceptance and curry your favor. When we hear the accusations of Satan more clearly than your rejoicing over us with singing.

So banner over us in love because Jesus' words to us are it is finished. So with great peace and fresh gratitude we pray in his name.

[26 : 50] Amen.