

The Triumph of God's Grace

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[0 : 00] So, let's start with the truth that we've been thinking about with the boys and girls on Sunday morning, that you and I as people made in God's image were made for joy. We were made to enjoy God, to experience Him in the world that He has made, to experience Him in His Word in such a way that our hearts will be filled with joy. More than that, in the Bible we're called to enjoy God.

I remember Philippians, a great letter about joy, chapter 3, chapter 4, rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. That God wants to draw our hearts, our minds, our attention to Jesus, that we would see Him in the gospel, that we would recognize His beauty and His glory, that we would delight in Him, that we'd be a praising, singing people.

And further, if we're here today and we're Christians, we have been saved for this specific reason, saved to enjoy God. There's that instinct for a saved-by-grace people to sing grateful praise. We could go back to Exodus 15. Here is Israel on the banks of the Red Sea. God has just opened the sea, and they've walked through in safety. God's enemies, the people's enemies have been judged, and the people, they sing a new song of salvation. Or we can think about the mindset of the apostles.

So after the resurrection of Jesus, after Jesus goes back to heaven, sends them the Spirit, sends them into the world, we see time and time again, they have this unstoppable joy.

[1 : 41] They can't and they won't stop talking about Jesus and all that He has done, regardless of what persecution or opposition might come. And it's the song of Isaiah 12, which is actually, as we'll see, it's the song of God's church. Here are God's people praising Him for saving grace.

There's a time stamp in our text. It's here twice, verse 1 and verse 4. In that day, you will say. In the first, well, from chapter 7 to chapter 12 of the book of Isaiah, in that day becomes a really prominent theme. In the past, it was a day that signaled, here is God's people under judgment.

Here they are sent into exile, living in slavery, in sort of darkness and gloom. But now, in that day, in a salvation day, the light of God's joy has dawned. Slavery has been ended and true freedom has come. In that day, we're told earlier in Isaiah that the remnant God saved by grace people will be drawn out from exile and taken home to be with God. In that day, that day of salvation, God's promised King will come. The King who is Emmanuel, God with us. The King who comes to establish the kingdom of peace. The King in the family line of David, whose throne endures forever. The one who's going to lead his followers back to God. In that day, there's a day of salvation and there's a day of joy. And so, this song that we're coming to in Isaiah 12 is a song that belongs to the church. It belongs to the people who have been saved by God's promised Messiah, King Jesus.

And central to this song, center of the chapter, is joy. Verse 3 is the center, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And the thrust of this chapter is this, that when a person experiences God's saving grace, or when a people, a community of God, when a church is satisfied by the goodness of Jesus and His salvation, there will be joy. And there will be praise. So, let's think about what it looks like. First couple of verses, we have joyful testimony, personal testimony to God's grace.

I will praise you, Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. If we were able to ask Isaiah, Isaiah, what's the most amazing thing about salvation?

[4 : 22] What is it that's captured your heart and your imagination right now? His answer would be this, that God is not against us, but He is for us. That God is a former enemy who is now for His people.

And remember what Isaiah has seen. Isaiah has seen, Isaiah chapter 6, he's seen God's awesome holiness. That vision in the temple. And he has become profoundly aware of his own personal

sinfulness, the gap, the holiness gap between God and people. He has heard the grace of God inviting the King of Israel and the people of Israel to trust and follow Him and Him alone. But he has seen and he has heard the people of God turning away, putting their trust in alliances with other nations or turning to worship other gods. And so, Isaiah knows this. Isaiah knows that God is right to be angry. Isaiah knows that sin is real and that guilt is real. Isaiah knows that separation is reality and judgment is what a sinful people deserves. But he also knows that God loves to show grace to undeserving sinners.

It's striking and it's important that in these first couple of verses, we are hearing the voice of God's personal testimony. God is a personal testimony. I will praise you. You were angry with me, but now you have comforted me. The Lord Himself is my salvation, my strength, and my defense.

This is where joy begins. Joy begins here, as we can say that the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me.

Not, I've read that in the Bible, or I know that this is a general true principle, but we know it deep down felt experience. That God loved me, sent His Son to die for me. There's two ways in particular that God's grace leads to personal joy as Isaiah brings it to us here. The first is to do with reconciliation. So, we read that although you were angry, your anger has turned and you have comforted me. So, the picture here, we can think about a battle scene. Here is war between two opponents that has turned to peace. Here is the end to anger. Here is the end to hostility. Here is the just and holy God who is now turning towards people to show mercy. And this brings one of the tension points in the Old Testament. So, we're presented with these two truths, that God is just and God is holy. God cannot overlook sin, cannot sweep sin under the rug, or it would deface His righteousness and His holiness.

[7 : 24] But God is also merciful and loves to forgive. And so, the tension is, how is that possible? And that tension continues, and we feel it all through the Old Testament, and it leads us all the way to resolution in the New Testament. Perhaps one place we can turn to hear it really clearly, how this tension is resolved, is in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 11 to 21 of 2 Corinthians 5 is all about the ministry of reconciliation. But here, 2 Corinthians 5 verse 18, for example, all this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Note who takes the initiative. God takes the initiative to reconcile a people to Himself. Verse 19, God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. This is a deliberate act and a choice of God to not count our sins against us, but rather to extend mercy. Verse 21, God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. How can God be just and merciful? Because He sent His Son to take our place, to die under the just judgment of God there on the cross, to pay the price in full satisfying justice.

But Jesus also comes to die on the cross to show us how loving and how merciful He is in being the substitute that we need. So, the anger that's spoken of in Isaiah 12, it doesn't fall on us, though that's what should happen. It falls on Jesus, the substitute.

God's anger is turned away, it's diverted because it doesn't fall on us, it instead falls on Jesus, the perfect sacrifice. Justice is satisfied by Jesus, the sin-bearer, so we can live at peace with God, and God can be reconciled to us. God is no longer hostile. The barrier of sin is broken down. Slavery and separation has been ended, so we can live with freedom, we can live at home with our God and see how that leads to joy. Your anger is turned away, now there's a new experience, you have comforted me.

Now, we know this from our children, we know this as we are children, when we hurt ourselves instinctively, when we need comfort, we feel sad, we feel anxious, the person we look for most often is going to be our mom or dad, a parent. We know they love us and we can trust them. And the Gospel says this is true of God our Father, that He is our source of comfort. Of course, the New Testament will take that even further.

Jesus will say, I'm going to send another comforter, the Holy Spirit, to come and live in us. And so, the Holy Spirit works in us and gives us that comfort and gives us that assurance, so we can stand before God and know that we're accepted, know that we come to a throne of grace. We can stand before the devil, our accuser, and when he tries to contend us, we know that we are forgiven, because Jesus was condemned in our place. And we can stand before the world, as hostile as it might be, and say joyfully, I belong to Jesus. We have comfort. So, there's reconciliation. But the other source of personal joy here in these opening verses is that we have in God a source of

refuge. Verse 2, Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord Himself is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. Here's a different picture of this changed relationship, that because of grace, God is no longer against us, but positively, He is on our side. Positively,

[11:26] He invites us to run to Him and to find refuge. And one of the ways that God's grace works in our hearts is He gives to us this strong certainty. Did you hear the certain words? Surely God is my salvation.

The Lord, the Lord Himself is my strength and my defense. God's grace gives us that knowledge that the personal, powerful God has committed Himself to us, and God and His Word will not and cannot fail.

And so, these first couple of verses give us really powerful reasons as the people of God for joyful praise. God has been reconciled to us, and God is a refuge to us.

And so, there's this personal praise that comes. And just before we move on from this, just to think by way of application, to recognize and to remember the power of personal testimony.

So, we're beginning Christianity Explored, and part of the preparation for Christianity Explored, for people involved in leading, is to take some time to think about how do we tell our story, the story of what Jesus has done for me, the reality of what Jesus means to me, both past, present, and future.

[12:48] What is it about the truth of God's Word, the truth about Jesus, that has transformed our hearts and our lives? There's a real power when we can communicate our personal stories in such a way that Jesus is glorified, that the gospel is highlighted. Think about, we read Mark 5, David read for us in Mark 5, that legion, you know, Jesus has delivered him from those demons, and he wants to go with Jesus.

Remember what Jesus says? Well, stay in your town. Tell them what the Lord has done for you.

Tell them that the Lord has shown mercy to you, and he spends the rest of his days traveling these 10 cities with this powerful testimony to saving grace discovered in Jesus.

Recently, some of you might have noticed this, the founder of Wikipedia, if you've ever written an essay, I hope we haven't used Wikipedia, but the founder of Wikipedia, who was a big buff and a big philosopher, he's recently become a Christian. It's really interesting, you can read like a really long account from him of that conversion. But what struck me, one of the things that struck me, was that part of what drew him, so he'd sort of been going to church as a kid, but kind of gave it all up for philosophy, but part of what drew him back was some online encounters, and maybe we recognize this. He said, well, while the sort of new atheists in particular, but atheists in general, were very kind of hostile and very negative, not showing any grace or tolerance at all of other viewpoints, he said, the Christians that I met online when I was asking honest questions were far more gracious and far more kind and far more thoughtful. And the more that he began to be drawn back towards Christianity, he began to realize, I have a lot of friends and family who I deeply respect and admire, and they're Christians. And so, the power of personal testimony remains important for us as we look to communicate our faith. Another thing to remember is to remember the power of God for us. God, by His grace, would want to give us the strong certainty that God is for us.

Maybe there's nowhere better we can turn than to Romans chapter 8. Let me read just a few of these verses. Romans 8, 31. What shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one, nobody, nothing.

So, when we find ourselves in a moment of crisis, where do we look? In whom do we trust? There is an invitation that comes from God Himself to know for sure, the Lord is my salvation, my strength, my defense. And as we come to discover His saving grace, His sustaining daily grace is enough, then we can joyfully sing. We are weak, but He is strong. We can joyfully experience what Isaiah writes of here, that sense of belonging to our Lord. It's why it's so important for us to be hearing the Word of God, to be receiving, to be trusting His promises, that we would both believe and live in the gospel.

[16:32] So, we've got the joyful testimony, personal testimony of God's grace. Let's now think about this middle section, verse 3, and this joyful, a shared experience, a joyful experience of God's grace. Just for a moment, let me take you to my grandpa's croft in Skye. My grandpa's croft was a wonderful place as a kid growing up. It had an old abandoned Massey Ferguson tractor that you could ride on anytime you wanted. It had a big old classic car. I don't know how long it had been

there. My grandpa never drove, so it was vintage. It was a house that had an outside toilet. That was novel.

And at the bottom of the croft, it still had a little old well. So, it was kind of novelty as a kid to go down to the well and to find some cool, refreshing water. But of course, in its day, that well was life-giving before taps came. You needed the well for life. Think about a desert traveler, and the need to find refreshing water becomes all the more pronounced. And think about these travelers, or think about the travelers in the book of Exodus, you know, the people that had been former slaves in Egypt, and they're going towards the promised land, but in between, they're going to have to walk through the wilderness. Or the exiles who are going to be brought home from Babylon again.

There's desert, there's wilderness. So, on their way home to God, they need wells of water, sources of life, sources of refreshing, strength for the journey. It becomes a gospel picture. Jesus in John 7, I will pronounce at a feast, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. And whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them. Speaking about the gift of the Spirit, an endless supply of God's presence and God's grace. Or in Revelation chapter 7, verse 17, we have this promise that Jesus, the Lamb, He will also be the shepherd, and He will lead His people to springs of living water. John chapter 4, when Jesus meets the

Samaritan woman beside the well, promising the water I give, will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life. So, there's a strong connection between wells and life and salvation and joy, and we have it here in verse 3, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. So, key to this joy that's experienced personally, key to this joy that's being spoken about for a whole people, is drinking deeply from the wells of salvation. It's first of all receiving the offered rescue. It's experiencing the gift of life. It's coming every day to receive strength for the journey of faith.

There's a shift in verse 3 from the singular to the plural, with joy you all will draw water from the wells of salvation. Of course, it must be an experience for us as an individual Christian.

But it's also the experience of the church, that we come together to receive and to enjoy saving grace and daily grace. And joy comes when we draw from the gospel wells. Notice it's wells. Not just a well, it's wells. Wherever we go in the journey of life, there is grace for us. There is more joy to receive from Jesus. Think about that when it comes to our Bible reading. Do we come to our Bible reading looking to draw deeply, joyfully from the well of salvation? You know, we turn to a book like the book of Genesis. We hear these wonderful promises of blessing, of covenant blessing, of the way God works through providence, that no failure of His people will stop His plans. Do we receive that with joy and with hope? Or we go to the book of Exodus and we read about God's commitment to redeem and rescue His power to bring a people to Himself for relationship. Does that give us a sense of joy when we realize He's still doing that? We turn to the book of Hebrews. We read those reflections about Jesus as the true prophet delivering God's final, greatest Word. We think about Him as the true priest, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice and now ever living to intercede for us. As we think about Him as the great promised King who rules over the church, whose kingdom will not fall. Does it give us joy? Do we come to the

[21 : 25] Bible to drink deeply? As we go to a book like Galatians, as we're reminded again and again, we're not saved by law-keeping. We're saved by God's grace to us and Jesus received through faith alone. Or when we come to the book of Revelation, does it give us a sense of joy as we remember time and time again Jesus saying to us, take heart, I will come back. I will make everything new. There will be justice and there will be salvation. There is an eternal kingdom of perfect love and joy. When we come to the Bible and we dig into wonderful doctrines, we discover the doctrine of adoption. We hear that God invites us to call Him Father, that He sends Jesus the Son so that we might be called sons of God, that the Spirit comes to live in us, calling out Abba Father. When we discover the reality of justification, that we are declared right before God through the work of Jesus so that nobody can condemn us, so that we know we're accepted.

When we think about the substitution of the Lord Jesus, all He went through for us, does it give us a sense of grateful joy? When we remember every salvation story is part of our family story as the church of God, every reminder of God's character in His Word is an invitation to us to behold and praise our God.

Every promise, every do not fear come as words from our faithful Father and Savior. There is joy for us, and we're invited to draw and drink and live. God's Word is a well.

I guess when people come to wells, they come feeling different things at different times, but certainly there's going to be times when people would come to a well with a sense of desperation, a

sense of desperate thirst. Do we come like that to God's Word and to worship?

Remember the song, I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold, I freely give the living water, thirsty one. Stoop down and drink and live.

[23 : 48] Sometimes if we're honest, we probably come to church with a sense of duty. Sometimes if we're honest, we probably read God's Word with a sense of duty. It's a good discipline. I can tick the box in my daily reading.

Do we recognize that we have a well of salvation, a well of joy, a well of delight that's open for us? God's Word is a well. And we should ask Jesus for a drink. Remember that Samaritan woman back in John chapter 4? She had thirst, didn't she?

She was looking around all over the place to try and find a love that would last. She desperately wanted someone who would make her feel accepted and valued and give her a sense of security. She was looking for something more.

And so when Jesus said, I can give you living water. Sir, give me a drink. I don't want to thirst anymore. Do we have that same longing that leads us to come to Jesus and say, give me grace?

[24 : 51] Do we come to God's Word asking our Father, give me grace from this well that will not fail? So we thought about personal joy.

And then we thought of this joyful experience, this shared experience of God's grace. And that naturally leads to the last section, verse 4 to 6, which is all about a joyful sharing of God's grace. And my brother helped to illustrate this for me last night. My brother's very kind and he's very generous. Last week, he went out, him and his wife went out and had a wonderful meal, a murder mystery themed meal.

And halfway through the meal, he thought to himself, I know someone else who'd really like this. Because I love murder mystery and I like food. And so he very kindly gave us a gift voucher to go out for a meal last night.

It was very nice. But think about that impulse. And we know this ourselves. Here is an experience. Here is a taste of joy. I'm enjoying something. What's going to complete my joy is sharing it.

[25 : 56] That takes us to the church on mission. I've had a personal experience of joy. First couple of verses. Now I'm drinking deeply from God's joy in verse 3. What naturally follows, I'm going to joyfully share.

Takes us to the mission of God, which is a mission of joy. What's the mission of the church? It's sharing the joy of Jesus. It's sharing. Here is what Jesus has done for me. How he has had mercy on me.

It's letting the world know the Lord is great. So again, what we've got in view here is the whole people of God. It's individuals saved by grace brought together as a community of faith together proclaiming.

Verse 4. Give praise to the Lord. Proclaim his name. Make known among the nations what he has done. What's our message? According to Isaiah 12.

Verse 4. We proclaim that God's name is great. His name is exalted. We proclaim his name. His name is a reflection of his character. What are we invited to do?

[26 : 55] We're invited to say there is no one like our God. There is no one whose character is so high and perfect. There is no one who is perfect in holiness like our God, matchless in majesty.

He is the creator and king over all the world, over all people. His nature is unchanging. His love is steadfast. We proclaim God's name.

And for us now, now that Jesus has come, we proclaim Jesus is Lord. We proclaim he is the one who deserves love and loyalty, who deserves trust and obedience.

God's name is great. God's works are great. Verse 5. Sing to the Lord this still joyful praise, for he has done glorious things.

Let this be known to all the world. God's works are great. God's works of creation are great. He is a personal, glorious creator.

[27 : 57] Again, just to go back to the founder of Wikipedia that recently became a Christian, the other thing that he found quite compelling was the variety of thoughtful presentations given to him over the years of the case for a creator.

We can look at the universe and we can see the fine-tuning, sometimes called the Goldilocks effect, that the world is just so, the conditions are just right for human life and human flourishing.

Or there's so much evidence, even within our own bodies and our complexity, for intelligent design. Or we can think more philosophically about where's the basis for our morality. If we have a justice system, well, what's the objective standard for what is just and right?

Or we can look more widely and think about the beauty of the universe. Where does beauty come from? Or we can think internally, where do these deep human longings come from and where are they going to be satisfied?

And putting all those together, this Wikipedia founder, I should really have remembered his name, all helped him to recognize there's a personal creator.

[29 : 05] And he was drawn towards the creator, but obviously more than that, as much as it's important for us to invite people to see the glory of God in his creation, we must go further and we must let people know there is a personal savior.

These glorious things that God has done for us as Christians are glorious redemption things. So again, we can think about the promise, first promise made in the Bible to Adam and Eve after they'd fallen into sin, that one would come from their family line who would crush the head of the serpent, one who would defeat and destroy the power of evil and sin that leads to death.

And we know that that's Jesus. Go to Abraham. Think about that promise of one coming from his family who'd be the source of blessing to all nations. We know that that's Jesus.

We think about that king of perfect righteousness promised to David who would rule and reign forever. We know it's fulfilled in Jesus. We know that Jesus has come to establish the new covenant in his broken body and shed blood at the cross whereby our sins are forgiven.

We have the law written in our hearts and we have the spirit given to us. And we know that Jesus has come once and he has defeated on the cross the powers of darkness and he's risen from the dead and he's coming again and he'll make everything new, including his people.

[30 : 35] And so we share Jesus, the glorious and great works of Jesus that our creator has entered in, in order to redeem.

God's name is great. God's works are great. Look at verse 6. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.

God among us is great. Jesus is the promised Emmanuel. God with us. God with us in his incarnation and becoming one of us.

God with us as he dwells in the hearts of his people. God with us in the heart of his people. There's this wonderful news within the Bible that God has not stayed at a distance, that God has not lived with that sense of separation, but rather he has made a way for the gap to be bridged through his reconciliation, through the sending of his son.

It's been really encouraging and I think lots of people have been noticing it. And even to hear the reports from the Christian Union of hundreds of people coming to listen and to go to different events, that there's a growing spiritual interest in an up-and-coming generation.

[31 : 57] People who are searching for something more, people who are looking to connect with, at very least, spiritual reality. And so our mission, our joyful mission, is to let people know God can be known.

God wants to be known. God can be experienced. He wants to be experienced personally. And that's abundantly clear because he sent his own son, Jesus, into the world. He came among us to save us.

And he comes among us to live with us, to give us grace and power, until he comes again to be with his people forever. And so we have a joyful mission to share of the goodness and the greatness of our God.

Again, if we're being honest, that's probably not always how we feel about our mission. Sometimes we feel fearful about it. Sometimes we feel discouraged because we don't see much change.

Sometimes we worry about having all the answers to people's hard questions, and we can really complicate things for ourselves and sometimes for others. It's important to have reasons for hope.

[33 : 06] But it's also important for us to remember we have a story to tell. We have a personal story to tell. And we have the story of Jesus to tell.

A personal experience of the joy of salvation, of the joy of belonging to Jesus, the joyful hope that comes from being with Jesus now and with Jesus forever.

And we can share that with others. It's a joy that must first, of course, be personal. But that brings us into a shared experience. A people of God who share the joy of salvation.

And as He draws us in to taste and to see that He is good, He then sends us out to complete our joy by inviting others in.

Verse 3 reminds us, With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. It may be true for all of us. This week we have that joyful experience, personally, collectively, as we recognize the goodness, the greatness, the glory of God in His salvation.