

The glory of the church

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to think about the reality of the church. What is the reality of the church? The reality is not always what you see. Sometimes what you see is not the real thing.

So what is the reality of the church? The church of Jesus Christ. What do I mean by the church of Jesus Christ? I mean the group of people arranged in communities who believe in Jesus Christ and have their sins forgiven.

That's what I mean by the church. It's not the same thing as the professing Christian church which can contain, probably does contain, people who have very little faith and don't take God very seriously at all but turn up to church now and again.

But I'm talking about real believers. What is the reality of the church? Sometimes we use the word church to mean the building. So St. James' church and its architecture.

That's just a church building. We're not talking about that. You might like to look around and see what you think of the people who are sitting here. What do you think of them?

[1 : 17] How many Nobel Prize winners are there here this morning? Not a lot. How many high-flying executives are here this morning? Not a lot.

How many people of the royal family are here this morning? Well, that's not what we're the sort of people that Jesus populates his church with.

He usually delights in people who are not all that special but they're special to him. You might think of the church as being a bunch of weirdos.

Losers in the eyes of the world certainly seem to be insignificant and I think that's more and more the case as Europe becomes more secular that God is excluded and Christian roots of our European civilization become further and further away.

The church is seen as insignificant. The Apostle Paul would say that the church like him is hard-pressed but not crushed.

[2 : 30] Struck down but not destroyed. A holy people and yet vexingly annoyingly sadly still battling with indwelling sin.

The church small struggling some churches are quite large aren't they? Our church isn't particularly large.

I think struggling is a word. Fighting is a better word because all churches are meant to be on a military footing fighting.

Not fighting each other but fighting the world the flesh and the devil. Persecuted dying dying is that how churches are seen?

Certainly there are fewer congregations in Brighton than there were a hundred years ago. How do you see the church?

[3 : 41] And what I want to do is to say how does God see the church? How does Christ see the church? And what I would like to impart is that God sees the church as glorious and absolutely central to the purposes of God in the Bible.

And what the Times and the Evening Argus and the BBC News wouldn't give half a sentence to God says those are the people those are the people I am using those are the people who are my chosen people they are the people of the future they are the people I will use in my plan of salvation.

And I want to try and give us that thought from Isaiah chapter 60 so my plan such as it is is three things one who is he talking about let's try and get that settled one who is he talking about two what is he saying and I'd like to itemize that under six headings some of it you will remember possibly six headings there and number three what are we supposed to make of it okay that's the plan first of all who is he talking about secondly what is he saying and there are six things of that and thirdly what

are we to make of it so let's carry on who is he talking to so we have Isaiah 60 it says arise shine for your light has come so who is the you who is he talking to have you had that experience when you're walking down the street when somebody waves to you and you you think they're waving at them

Steve but I'm sure I was waving at Christopher behind you and you have this embarrassing where you go and then you think oh actually it was a complete stranger so who is who is God looking at when he says arise shine for your glory has come this is Zion the city of God it says does it say in verse 10 the city of God I put verse 10 foreigners will rebuild your walls foreigners will serve you so who are these people it is the city but what sort of city the city as it is in history or the city sort of in the distant future in eternity and I'd like to say there are sort of three places that God's eye is resting on he can't just be looking into the future because if the nations are brought in that must have happened in history that must be part of our period of history that's when the nations get brought in however it does talk about there's no sun or moon in verse 19 so that I think is the very distant future

I put the word eschatological it just means the last things after this age the age to come when there's no sun or moon that's what so is it the physical city as it was then and it certainly starts back there because if you remember in Isaiah he talks about Zion the Zion that he lived in those sort of 600 years before Christ or whenever it was so he starts there and it's certainly starting with that but his vision is of what earthly Zion ought to have been but one day will be there's a present sense of Jerusalem the apostle Paul talks about this in Galatians where he says in chapter 4 verse 25 he talks about the present city of Jerusalem which is in slavery but the

[7 : 49] Jerusalem that is above is free and she is our mother we already belong to the new Jerusalem the sort of heavenly Jerusalem and as Christians we already belong there but the future of it is in Revelation I saw what's it say for the picture of what's to come I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth was passed away 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 so we've got those we've got those three sort of horizons the earthly city of Jerusalem as it was then the beginnings of the city of Jerusalem that we belong to now but that city is in heaven and the future city of Jerusalem as it will be in the new heaven and the new earth okay so that's who he's talking to that's who he's talking about so that's us if we're believers in some sense or other now this chapter doesn't come in the middle of nowhere it follows in a pattern of things and it follows on from the bit that

Rosemary was reading in 59 for example in verse 16 it says God's arm is working and God is going to do something powerful with his arm it says the redeemer will come chapter 59 verse 20 the redeemer will come somebody will come and do a mighty thing to do salvation and there will be a new covenant in verse 21 when you go past this chapter and go on to the next chapter there is somebody speaking there the spirit of the sovereign lord is on me the lord has anointed me to produce good news to the poor so this is to do with somebody who in 63 verse 1 is mighty to save and this city is not produced because of evolution or because it will just happen by itself or because that's what people are like they're nice good people it's produced because it's produced by the actions of a mighty god doing a mighty salvation okay are we clear on that that's how these things can be said of

Zion because a saviour makes it so okay what does he say about the city well there's lots of things in the chapter and I don't know whether you were able to concentrate on that but there's this and there's those and there's those and those those and there's that and there's those and there's those and there's those and there's those and there's that and there's more of those and there's people doing that and let's go through them oh there's more of those as well so let's just go through those things one by one and pick them up so I did do this for the boys and girls but I guess we could have adults doing this this is a word that is in verse one I something oh dear I've even got that wrong haven't I I something okay that's incorrectly spelt at the top there it's in verse one it's in verse three nations will come to your it's in verse twenty implied there yeah the sun will never set again the moon will wane no more the lord will be your so I don't know either of you younger people want to have a go at it light well done you're better than me because you got it right and I got it yeah well done okay light so here's something about light and this city is a city of light your light has come nations will come to your light verse nineteen the sun will be your light no more will be your light for the brightness the lord will be your everlasting light and your god will be your glory verse twenty the

lord will be your everlasting light this is a place of light because of god and it is the opposite of the nations because the nations are in darkness darkness covers the earth thick darkness is over the peoples but the lord rises upon you so this is the place in the whole world where you get light light the church of jesus christ is the place of light and it starts may i say with jesus have a go at this boys and girls who said i am the something of the world beginning beginning with I a word that we've already used go on i think you get a round of applause because yeah jesus said i am the light of the world and the light of the world shines through him and if we belong to him the light sort of spills out onto us and jesus said to his disciples you are now the light of the world let your light shine so that people will see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven don't put your light under a washing up bowl and this theme of light is one that is picked up in the new testament the father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light he has rescued you from the dominion of darkness and brothers and sisters we've been brought into light we don't have to live in darkness we don't have to live in the shame of cloaking up our sins we can confess them freely to the lord and have them washed away and we can walk in the light in ephesians it says once you were darkness now you are light in the lord arise oh sleeper and rise from the dead and christ will shine on you that's paul picking up some of these ideas from isaiah and applying them to the ephesian christians and says you are light and your light can shine and you can live in a way of light that isn't darkness and hidden and sort of like a woodlouse hiding under a bucket in the dampness and secrecy you can live a life of light and indeed the apostle john says that christians walk in the light we walk in the light let me just read that text from one john if we claim to have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of jesus his son purifies us from all sin if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness and here's the christian walking in the light it's not the same as being without sin at all we say we have no sin the truth is not in us we haven't understood the gospel at all we're all sinners we confess our sins to the lord openly freely and we learn perhaps as we do so more and more about what's going on inside us that produces that sin and we confess it and the blood of jesus cleanses us from all sin and we don't have to walk under a cloud we don't have to walk in guilt we don't have to walk in shame that sin is gone and we can say lord help me i offer myself to you to live rightly now show me how to do that and that's a continual process it's called walking in the light and the first thing i'm picking out here is light and the future of the city is light number two right let's see whether i've got this one right i think i have right second thing in isaiah the second thing in isaiah oh dear right let's go back right let's see whether it worked this time right anybody like to suggest what that word is you get it because you're there quickly it's glory right give steve a round of applause well done yeah glory so this is a place of glory verse 2 i've gone the wrong chapter verse 2 the glory of the lord rises upon you the church is the place of glory even if it's a handful of insignificant people meeting in a decaying building there's glory there if jesus christ is there his glory appears over you verse 19 the lord will be your glory there's several words for glory here because i've looked at it this morning one of them means beauty something beautiful we live in a world of ugliness don't we if you watch the news i think they just choose the ugly things to show us because they're more newsworthy but the the church is a place of beauty sorry i was on the word glory one of the words that is translated glory is sort of like adornment or beauty the main word that the Bible uses for glory is the word! weightiness significance sort of goodness something that matters that's serious and joyful and wonderful brilliant and weightiness the writer David Wells who is no relation to me had a chapter in one of his books about this and he says that our world has become weightless that nothing particularly matters significance I look occasionally on the BBC news website on my phone and at the top of it's got people I don't know a terrible situation in Kabul for example shall we say that and then three places down it's got something like I lost my dog and I don't know something extremely trivial or my parrot said a rude word or something like that and you think this is news is it these are the things that matter where is the weight here where is the sense of what is significant is it really significant what a parrot said is that news is that something we all need to know about but the church is the church of glory and of weightiness and there is something about the church of

[19 : 41] Jesus Christ that is of eternal significance the people of God are the people of eternity in the Old Testament the the smoke and the cloud showed the glory the presence of God in glory it was there in the tabernacle it was in Solomon's temple it's there in Isaiah's vision isn't it then the

glory of the Lord filled the temple and we have the glory there and he says this is exactly what the old Jerusalem wasn't the glory departed Ichabod the nations exchanged the glory of God for a lie and that's what Paul says in the beginning of Romans is the sin of humanity isn't it you take the glory of God and exchange it for a lie and Paul will also say that the destiny of God's people is glory he will say we are the people who boast in the hope of glory but where we are headed to is glory we stand in grace and we are headed to glory and when you become a

Christian you maybe in a very intense way to begin with you sense that there's a story of in the Welsh revival I think it is somebody being saved and saying to the preacher excuse me Mr. Williams glory and that's what salvation is isn't it we get a taste of the amazing goodness and brilliance of God we boast in the hope of glory number three what does he say about this city the bringing in of the ah look can you do that one the bringing in of the nachos the bringing in of the n something t something I've got that right haven't I yeah anybody have a go at that nations nations nations yeah well done the bringing in of the nations and all the nations will come now please just get a sense of how radical this is Isaiah is a prophet in Israel God has limited his work to his chosen people

Israel by and large through history what there's been one or two exceptions you know Ruth the Moabites etc but largely speaking Israel has had the privilege of being God's chosen people and Jewish people today would still be conscious of that the privilege they have but this says he'll bring in the nations and I guess most of us here are not ethnically Jewish most of us here are ethnically something different and we get brought in here's the nations coming in it's in verse 12 the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish verse 16 you will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts and you will know that I the Lord am your saviour your redeemer the mighty one of Jacob the nations it isn't the nations will become Jews it says their nations will be brought in and they come does it say they will serve you so the nations come in acknowledging that salvation is from the Jews because that's right the only way of salvation is through this book with this God who did base himself in this nation Israel and if we're going to come as non Jews we have to submit ourselves to the scriptures that God gave the Jews and we have to say please may we look at your scriptures etc please may we join in with your God and the big question is how will this all happen how will this all happen will it be possible that the nations will come in as second class citizens so the [24 : 30] Jews are the top dogs as it were and then the nations get brought in as sort of servants because it looks a bit like that doesn't it they will serve you and I think that when the apostle Paul had understood the gospel Damascus road everything changes go back to the bible see what it actually says and he goes back and he understands the gospel and the mystery that had been hidden and I should have put Ephesians 3 not Ephesians 2 and he says I become a servant of this gospel and I serve this mystery the mystery is that through the gospel the Gentile Gentiles are heirs together with Israel members together of one body share us together in the promise of Christ Jesus that the Gentiles are not second class citizens but they share together with the promises made to

Abraham they share together with the promises made to Israel they share together in one body and they share together in the promises of Christ Jesus and that's amazing that people like us who don't deserve it and have no ethnic right to these promises are brought in as full citizens you know we don't have to wait to get our citizenship or pass an extra test we're brought in as full citizens and I think that's amazing the mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles heirs together with Israel members of one body share us together in the promise in Christ Jesus there are no second class citizens in the kingdom of heaven there are no second class citizens in the kingdom of heaven adopted into his family heirs together sons and daughters of the living

God which to me is amazing it is isn't it we should have that privilege that we call God father and there is nobody no Christian who say well I'm not I am a Christian but I can't call God my father it's the birthright of every Christian isn't it the bringing of the nations I'm getting ahead of myself the fruitfulness of I'm going to have a go at that one ch something I have I got it right yeah I think so what do you think children do you want to have a go as well it was easy wasn't it ok yeah well done fruitfulness of children previously Zion was barren and childless and unfruitful it's one of the things that's said about her but here it says you will have many children look at verse 4 lift your eyes and look around you all assemble and come to you your sons come from afar your daughters are carried on the arm you will look and be radiant your heart will throb and swell with joy so here are the sons and daughters coming back verse 8 and 9 who are these that fly along like clouds like doves to their nest the islands look to me in the lead of the ships of Tarshish bringing your sons

from afar with their silver and gold so in some people's experience children go off to university and they come back after their first term bringing all their washing with them and everything like that and mum and dad let's assume mum and dad are there they say oh we're longing to see you you've been away for so long we've got your room ready and we've got a lovely meal ready and here's the train that brings you and it's fantastic to see you again and it's a sort of little human illustration isn't it but here is

Zion and her sons and daughters come from afar and oh look here they are here they are arriving this is wonderful there they are the ships bringing them the barren woman wears children by the power of the promise of God children we are not children of the slave woman but children of the free woman Galatians 4:30 Jerusalem who is above is free and she is our mother we are children of God and I just put there some words about that there is a dignity to being a child of God we can be misunderstood we can be oppressed we can be we can stumble and fall we can get things wrong we can do all sorts of things but we're still children of God and it says that he lifts up those who have fallen he welcomes back those who turn to him he never lets his children go not everybody has had the experience of a good earthly father but every

Christian does have the experience of a wonderful heavenly father we are children there is dignity there is freedom we have the glorious freedom of the children of God we're not slaves we don't serve as slaves we don't live as slaves we live as free people in the Lord Jesus Christ and we have this amazing privilege that we can call God our father behold what manner of love the father has bestowed on us that we should be called sons of God I use the masculine sons because the sons inherit but it applies equally to daughters daughters of sons as well in my understanding of it children let's sing something before we come to the last couple of what have we got two more two more of these anybody do this one yes something service do you think ah

[31:03] I'm going to go with service actually because that fits so we'll just say but thank you for the thought let's yep service the service of the nations the nations bring their wealth that's right isn't it s-e-r-v-i-c-e yeah that's right no no it isn't is it no I put too many stars in there s-o-deer did it last thing yeah apologies service of the nations the nations bring their wealth into Zion let's look at this verse 5 the wealth on the seas will be brought to you the riches of the nations will come verse 6 herds of camels will cover you young camels from Midian and ephor the authorised version says herds of camels will cover you which I always think is a wonderful promise to claim please lord cover me with herds of camels I think the translation is right to put in land

I think that's the implication will cover your land verse 9 they will bring your sons from afar with their silver and gold verse 11 men will bring you or people will bring you the wealth of the nations verse 13 the glory of Lebanon the pine the fur the cypress so there's some particular things from Lebanon and verse 16 you will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts and verse 17 instead of bronze I will bring you gold silver in place of iron instead of wood I will bring you bronze and iron in place of stones so these are things that the nations bring into the city they bring in there's the camels there's the gold there's wealth and the city is enriched by the achievements of the nations the city is enriched by the achievements of the nations so here is the church as she is as she will be not simply limited to one ethnicity but bringing in the achievements of all the ethnic groups all the all the nations and the distinctive contributions of the different ethnic groups the wealth of the nations what particular thing would be brought in by well

Lebanon brings their timber because that's what Lebanon was good at it was good at timber and you think what will Welsh people bring into the kingdom I always like to go down this little line of thought I think singing I think the Welsh people say that the language that's going to be spoken in heaven is Welsh but because it's the best language for praising God I guess not everybody's going to agree with that what will the Chinese people bring into the kingdom I mean their vast heritage and ancient wisdom yet to see I suppose the English will bring gardening possibly tea well we don't know but all the I make it sound comical but it is saying that the whole human project and the whole developments of different civilizations which have achieved things language music architecture football whatever it is it will be brought in won't be lost it will enrich the city to come and perhaps Paul had this in mind in the book of Acts where he was keen for the Gentile churches to support the Jerusalem church and the Judean Christians when they went through a famine and he was really keen he actually stopped some of his evangelistic work if I got the story correct in order to bring a gift from the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church to support and bless them in revelation the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into the city the Germans the Chinese the Welsh the

Italians you name it they'll all bring something in and sixthly the ruin of have I got this right I think I got that right yeah okay so it's a question worth asking because it's got a correct answer you think enemies and I think enemies as well yeah well done the church of

Jesus Christ does not live in neutral territory we live in a spiritually hostile environment and don't have sort of over dramatize it but I think every Christian knows that we are daily in a battle with the world of the flesh and the devil sometimes we're our own worst enemies but there's no day when we don't have a spiritual battle there are enemies because that's the nature of the cosmos in which we live but these enemies will bow down and the Abrahamic situation was that those who cursed Abraham would be cursed and those who blessed him would be blessed and it depended their spiritual situation depended on their relationship to Abraham as the representative of God and there's a thing here about enemies verse 10 foreigners will rebuild your walls and their kings will serve you now do they do this willingly or unwillingly verse 12 the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish it will be utterly ruined 14 the sons of your oppressors will come bowing down before you all who despise you will bow down at your feet so

[37 : 21] I don't want to press this button too hard because I feel somewhat uncomfortable with quite how you take it but it's definitely there isn't it the ruin of the enemies of the church of Jesus Christ and we are definitely told every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and that's the promises there will be a day when every knee will bow every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord and that's his people who do so willingly and gloriously because they've thought that for a long time it also includes those who are not yet his people who never become his people who reluctantly and grudgingly come to the point of saying I was wrong all my life I had all those chances you spoke to me so often but I insisted that you are not

Lord and I was wrong and how bitter that is because Jesus Christ is Lord and every tongue will confess to that and I want to focus that upon Jesus Christ as being the one before whom the enemies bow died died died!

died! died! died! died! died! died! died! died! Christ is in the midst. Please never despise the assembling of the people of God. It's always worth being there. Never say, oh I've got something that's even more glorious to do than being with the people of God because there isn't anything more glorious to do than be with the people of God. The calling in, the grafting in of the nations and brothers and sisters, that's why I think all of us are here this morning, isn't it? If there's anybody here who would be ethnically

Jewish then I beg your pardon, but I think all of us here have come in from the outside and have been brought in and made welcome. The fruitfulness of children, that we have made children of the living God. The service of the nations, the enrichment that the different nations bring and the ruin of her enemies. These are the things that God says about his city. My third point then is the intended response and I want to say, this is just very briefly, this should be inspiring.

Let's look by faith and not by sight. Let's look at what the church of God is as God sees it. It is a glorious project to build the church of Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ is a glorious and inspiring thing. He will build his church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it and let's be inspired to be part of that.

[40 : 40] Let's be praying that God will build his church. Let's give God no rest until the church becomes the, I can't remember the wording of it, the delight or something like that, until it's built up.

Let's testify and encourage one another and encourage people to belong. Let's encourage them to go up to the house of the Lord. This is what life is about. This is why we're given life, so that we can belong to the church of Jesus Christ. Number one was inspiration and brothers and sisters, we need to be inspired by God's word because there's plenty of the rest of things that throws cold water on our understanding of the church. Let's be inspired by what God says is the reality of it. Number two, expectancy about the future of God's church. The city in the future is where we're heading to and we're like pilgrims making progress towards that city. Do you know, I've just had the idea for a book. I think there's a book there with a name, something to do with pilgrim and progress. I hope nobody's thought of it already. John Bunyan, when he did actually write

Pilgrim's Progress, I think this is the second volume, said of, I think this is Pilgrim's wife actually, she said, there's the city that I'd always longed to enter and there is the king in the city of whom I have heard but I will now see with my own eyes and the thought of this lies as a burning coal within my heart and she crosses the river, the cold river of death, the river Jordan to enter the city and there's a great cheer when she enters and that's what we're to be looking forward to, you know,

enter the great heavenly city. Let's be expectant, let's focus on that in our lives and a dignity about God's city now and we're going to sing in a moment. I forget the first line.

That's it, glorious things of you, I'll do you, glorious things of you are spoken, Zion's city of our God. He whose word cannot be broken formed you for his own abode. On the rock of ages founded, what can shake your sure repose? With salvation's walls surrounded, you may smile at all your foes.

To belong to the church of Jesus Christ gives us dignity. And to arise and shine like it says here and not to think of ourselves as just failures. That's not saying we don't sometimes fail, but that doesn't define us as being failures or losers or castaways. But we say, well, I'm a redeemed failure. I'm a loser who's been found and who's been given glory. I was a castaway but I've been brought into the palace of the king and I'm a son and daughter of the living God and I live in that dignity and let's live in that dignity. And that's the end of what I was going to say. Let's sing together.

[43 : 57] Let's sing together.