

God's Glorious Justice and Christ's Return

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[0:00] All right. My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples.

! The coastlands hope for me and for my arm they wait.! In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So lately I've been making my way through the Jesus Storybook Bible with Mia again.

Do we have any Jesus Storybook Bible fans? Yeah. Now, I have to say I'm not sure which one of us is enjoying it the most, but I think it might be me.

I have to admit that this children's Bible storybook makes pretty good devotional reading, as it turns out. Now, if you're not familiar with the Jesus Storybook Bible, it's written with the understanding that the whole Bible points us to Jesus.

It's written with the intention of using that to point children to Jesus. Now, the other day we were reading the account of the fallen there, and I was struck yet again by what we read.

[1:28] And yes, I am about to cite a children's Bible in my sermon, and I'm not the least bit embarrassed about it. Now, speaking of Adam and Eve, it says, Before they left the garden, God made clothes for his children to cover them.

He gently clothed them, and he sent them away on a long, long journey, out of the garden, out of their home. Well, in another story, it would have all been over, and that would have been the end. But not in this story. God loved his children too much to let the story end there. Even though he knew he would suffer, God had a plan, a magnificent dream.

One day he would give his children back. One day he would make the world their perfect home again. And one day he would wipe away every tear from their eyes. Now, why in the world did I start there this morning?

I started there, quite honestly, because as I was reading the text for this week, what we read in Isaiah reminded me of what I read in the Jesus Storybook Bible.

[2:34] Now, why would this Storybook Bible remind me of what Isaiah says? Well, I think it's because Isaiah knew about the plan that it's talking about.

Isaiah, as we read him, reminds us that God would get his children back one day. He tells us that one day God would make the world our perfect home again. We see that when we read Isaiah. And we read about that this morning. I should mention, before we jump into Isaiah, that reading Isaiah is sometimes fairly tricky business. Sometimes difficult to know exactly what Isaiah is talking about.

He doesn't always have a linear timeline. So, what's going on? Are we talking about a present reality? Are we talking about the near future or the distant future? Isaiah jumps around and it's not always clear to readers.

And the portion of Isaiah that we have this morning, I think, is really no exception. On the one hand, it could apply most immediately to comforting those suffering from the exile.

[3:42] Yet, it's often been suggested, and rightly, I think, that this portion of Isaiah also looks forward to the day of the Lord. The day when God will judge the world and restore his creation.

We see God encouraging his people in light of that coming day. And encouraging us too, I think.

So, with that in mind, let's see what our passage has for us this morning.

Starting with verses 1 and 2. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you. For he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. Well, we see, first of all, that this is a message that is addressed to those who seek the Lord.

That's who the message is for. And then we start with the hearers being told to look to the rock from which they were hewn. Now, I think without any context, we'd be wondering what in the world that

means.

[4:45] But if we look, I think we can find the meaning pretty clearly in verse 2. Where we read, Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you.

For he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. So, that rock, that quarry that's being talked about, is the origin of the people of God, bound in Abraham.

Now, before we find ourselves wondering what in the world does this have to do with us, remember that even if Abraham is not our great-granddaddy according to the flesh, we are still Abraham's children through faith in Christ.

So, let's stop and consider Abraham and Sarah for a second. Abraham was one man. He and Sarah were old. We see that Sarah was in her 90s when she gave birth to Isaac.

Do we have anyone in their 90s in attendance amongst us? Yeah, that's unusual, isn't it? But here's the thing.

[5:52] God promised Abraham that he would make a great nation through Abraham. And that promise was made when Abraham is old and childless, right? That's an unusual promise.

But God promised that all the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham. And what happened? In their old age, Abraham and Sarah have a son. They have Isaac.

His descendants flourish. They do become a great nation. Not only that, let's look at things through our New Testament glasses for a second. We have Jesus descended from Abraham through Isaac.

And all the nations of the world being blessed through him. And then the New Testament tells us that all those who believe in God and trust in his promises are children of Abraham in Christ.

I think this reinforces what our text is getting at. God could bring so much out of one elderly couple. Out of such humble origins. God could bring all of this out of one man.

[6:58] That's reassuring to us because sometimes we're tempted to doubt that when God sets out to do something, it's really going to get done. We go on to read in verse 3.

For the Lord comforts Zion. He comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden. Her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her thanksgiving in the voice of song.

So what's going on with this reference to Zion? Is this a mere reference to Jerusalem? I think that we're also seeing here really a reference to the new Jerusalem.

The heavenly city that will be established when Jesus comes again. On the day of the Lord.

Because in verse 3, don't we basically see examples of the curse of death being overturned?

The desert, the wilderness where there's waste and death has become like Eden. We see that God can and will do this. That God can and will bring light where death reigned.

[8:05] God can bring joy and gladness. Song and thanksgiving where grief and mourning once reigned. God comforts his people. He brings life and joy.

And one day, he will completely vanquish death and mourning forever. I think that's worth paying attention to. We read verse 4.

Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation. For a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. Now God is telling his people, Israel, that his teaching is going to go out to the whole world.

That God's justice will be a light for the nations. We're talking ultimately about the knowledge of God and the righteousness of God filling the whole world. That's an amazing thing.

Go on to read in verse 5. My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands hope for me.

[9:12] And for my arm they wait. God will save and judge. We see God's salvation and God's judgment will not be limited to Israel, but will extend to the nations.

I don't know about you, but I am pretty happy about that. And I should mention here that when we talk about God's justice, aren't we often left with an unbalanced idea of what that means?

We tend to emphasize only one aspect of God's justice, which is punishing evil. But when we talk about Jesus judging the world, as he will on the last day, our catechism, and those of you in Sunday school will remember this from a couple of weeks ago, reminds us that it means that everything that is wrong will be made right.

Can you imagine what it will be like when everything that is wrong is made right? That is an awesome, awesome promise. And then the catechism goes on to ask, should you be afraid of God's judgment?

And the catechism tells us, the unrepentant should fear God's judgment, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. But for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation.

[10:38] I have no reason to fear the coming judgment. For my judge is my Savior, Jesus Christ, who loves me, died for me, and intercedes for me. All that is to say that God is going to judge the world, and that it's something that should encourage us and not terrify us.

God's righteousness draws near, salvation has gone out, and God is going to judge in righteousness. Thank God He is.

So we have cause to hope, but to hope only in God. What other hope do we have?

We read in verse 6, So, not really breaking news here.

People die. The heavens won't last forever. Raymond, our astronomer, how long until the universe starts to collapse?

[12:02] Or, I guess, more in the less distant future, how long until the sun burns out? About four and a half billion years. Four and a half billion years.

So it might take a while, but it's going to happen. Right? Right? The earth and the things that are on the earth aren't going to last forever. They're going to wear out.

And all this would be a major bummer if it weren't for the fact that our God's salvation is forever.

That God's salvation and God's righteousness never wear out.

I read this. I find myself thinking on what I read with Mia in the Jesus Storybook Bible.

God had a plan. One day He would get His children back. One day He would make the world their perfect home again. One day He would wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[12:59] And He will. This fallen world is dying and decaying, and so are we. But God will make the world our perfect home again.

Because He can make Eden out of the wilderness. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And God's salvation will be forever.

Why? How do we know? I would point us to something that we say every single week. Because Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

God's salvation has come to us through the shed blood of Jesus. God's righteousness will never be dismayed because the risen Jesus is victorious over every enemy.

And not just victorious, but victorious for us. And this same Jesus is coming back. Why? To usher in a new heaven and new earth.

[14:06] To raise the dead. To judge the world. To reign as King. All of these things are true. But if we're tempted to think about that only in an abstract kind of way, let's make it more personal.

He is coming back for you and me. He's coming back to rescue us. And we can trust with full confidence that this is true.

For now, we wait.

We wait for his return. We wait for the day of the Lord. The day that the prophets saw coming. So what are we doing in the meantime?

I'm glad you asked. Somehow, going back to the catechism for a second, the catechism anticipated that you would ask too. Funny how that works out. In the catechism we read, what should be your attitude as you await Jesus' return?

[15:15] The answer says, I should anticipate with joy the return of Jesus as the completion of my salvation. The promise of his return encourages me to seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to live a holy life, and to share the hope of new life in Christ with others.

This day, my brothers and my sisters, As we think about the renewing power of our God, As we think about his promise to restore his creation, Let's seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let's seek to live a holy life, And seek to share the hope of new life in Christ with others. And let's be joyful.

My goodness, don't we have every reason to be joyful? Our sins are put away through the blood of Christ, So we don't have to be afraid of judgment.

We have the promise of eternal life, Because we have a risen and victorious Lord. So today, Look forward with joy To the completion Of the promises that are already ours in Christ Jesus.

[16:40] His salvation Will be forever. And his righteousness will never be dismayed. Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, And of the Son, And of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.