

Joy, the Crowning of Redemption

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back briefly this morning to Isaiah 51. Isaiah chapter 51 and we're going to focus on verse 11 where we read, And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.

Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Now these are obviously words that are packed full of assurance and comfort but it's important to know something of the historical background to these types of verses and indeed to a book like the prophecy of Isaiah.

Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah particularly were given to live at a time when the people of Judah were facing a crisis. The crisis was really spiritually and morally one of their own making.

They had departed from obedience to God. They had gone away from the ways that God had specified for his worship, for his service, for being faithful to him.

They had imported many of the practices of the pagan people around them into their own practice as well. And so the prophets gave the message of God to them that unless they turned from these ways and came back to being faithful to God they were going to be driven away or taken away from where God had located them in Jerusalem and Zion the worship place where the temple was near Jerusalem where the focus was on the worship of God.

[1 : 42] God was going to take them away from that. God was going to bring a foreign people to invade them and actually take them away into captivity. And that's what happened. God's word came as God's word always comes to be true.

God came to be true in their experience because after the Assyrian Empire had dwindled and was taken over by the Babylonian Empire based on Babylon the people of Jerusalem, of Judah were in fact many of them taken by Nebuchadnezzar away to be captive in Babylon.

And they were there for 70 years. A whole generation of the people spent their time apart from a few that had been left in the vicinity of Jerusalem but the temple came to be ruined the place fell into ruins around them and for that whole generation there was no worship as such or service as such for God in Jerusalem, in Zion.

And the prophets as they prophesied this also announced a return on the part of the people. They weren't going to be in Babylon for the rest of history God was going to bring them back and that also happened as you know from the books of the Bible when you go to Ezra, to Nehemiah when you look at the prophecies of Zechariah and Haggai they were sent by God to encourage the people as they came back to come back and in coming back to rebuild the temple to re-establish the community of God in Jerusalem in the temple to worship Him again.

But the prophets went beyond that God gave them to see beyond the mere history of Judah God gave them to widen the scope of their prophecies so as to include the days in which you and I live and indeed to go beyond that right up to the final days of the world and into eternity because when you look at the wonderful passages in the prophecy of Isaiah such as the one we're looking at here you cannot confine that to the return of Israel or Judah from Babylon nor even to the things that belong to this world right through to the end of the world it takes you right into eternity it takes you right into heaven it takes you right into the city of which Zion really is a representation or a symbol or a type in this world the city of heaven itself you compare this with the way that the book of the Revelation the final book of the Bible pictures for us the final state of things

[4 : 23] God and his people glorified his people together with God God in their midst and heaven described as a city with all its exact measurements in place and the people of God inhabiting it that is all there in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah these old prophecies but they're there in embryonic form they're there as you see them they're there it carries you right through the process of history right up to the conservation so you always keep that in mind that Zion for example becomes

eventually the city of God in heaven that the people of God in Jerusalem become the people of God through the New Testament age and right on into eternity and that God in their midst in Zion in the temple becomes God in the midst of his people in eternity forevermore dwelling in their midst and they with him enjoying his presence that's something of what you need to keep in mind as you look at this let's look at the text itself and there are two things in it that are significant and some other points around that first of all it's to do with redemption the ransomed of the Lord shall return you notice the previous verse there was it not you who dried up the sea the waters of the great deep this is taking us back to the Exodus the crossing of the Red Sea a really significant event in the Old Testament it's brought up so many times as one of the great events that pictures for us

God's deliverance God leading his people out of captivity and into a journey with himself that ends in the promised land and here is the allusion to it or the reference to it where God is prayed to as it were that he would again show his power was it not you who dried up the sea the waters of the great deep who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over and the ransomed of the Lord in other words the ransomed of the Lord are the redeemed the redeemed are those who are redeemed by a ransom that's always held together these two concepts of ransom and on a ransom price and redemption so let's look in more detail at this redemption first of all it talks about redemption in terms of our redeemer God is the redeemer of his people redeeming means to take back to yourself something that you have lost and to take it back by paying for it by paying a price for it when you think about our human condition as sinners we have come to be estranged from God

God hasn't lost his claim over us as God he's claiming us back for himself through the gospel but we have brought on ourselves that alienation that distance from God where essentially we have become lost sinners and redemption means God doing something to bring us back to himself and redemption means bringing us back by paying the price of our sin by paying our debt by cancelling our debt in Jesus Christ the redeemer now this word redeemer is used actually about 14 times in Isaiah along with the word redemption but the word redeemer go to chapter 54 for example just a couple of pages onwards you'll find in verses 5 and 8 there your maker is your husband the Lord of hosts is his name and the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer the one who redeems you who buys you back who purchases you who takes you back to himself and verse 8 as well in overflowing anger for a moment

I hid my face from you but were everlasting love I will have compassion on you says the Lord your redeemer there's again the historical reference to the people he has for a moment for a generation they have come to experience this captivity this exile in Babylon but he says with loving kindness with everlasting love I will have compassion on you and if you think of when you throw a stone into the water and you find the circles emanating out from that the ripples widening out that's what it's like in these prophecies you begin with the inner circle as in where the historical reference Judah itself the people of Isaiah's day but then the prophecy has ripples beyond that as we've seen right up to redemption in Christ but with loving kindness with steadfast love I will have compassion on you I will redeem you I am your redeemer there shouldn't be in our experience a more precious word to us than the word redeemer and maybe we don't use it often enough but Christ is our saviour yes he's our saviour but saviour means redemption it means he's our redeemer it means he's done something to bring us back to God now again you've got to go to the Old Testament because the concept of redeemer and what a redeemer does is brought out beautifully in the book of Ruth when you go to the book of Ruth it's a very short book but it's a lovely book it's a beautiful picture of Ruth you remember as she came back with Naomi was a widow husband had died and Boaz was her near relative who had the responsibility and indeed the right to become a husband because in Old Testament days if a woman was left widowed then she was very vulnerable and it wasn't just a duty as such that the nearest relative the next of kin the man who was nearest relation to her had the right to take her as his wife in order to give her security in order to take up her needs and that word redeemer in the

[10:51] Old Testament in the Hebrew word goel has that idea in it it's the next of kin taking up the responsibility for the person who's deprived who's in need who stands vulnerable and you take that idea right into the spiritual meaning of it it's something that nobody else dare do you see nobody should interfere with the right of a redeemer take for example Boaz he made sure that he himself was secure in doing this that he had this right that it was something that lay to him to do and he did it you weren't allowed to interfere with the rights of a redeemer if somebody else tried to usurp

that if somebody else tried to get in first ahead of the redeemer that was a serious matter you were taking on yourself something you didn't have a right to the redeemer had rights to actually take up the needs of the nearest relative who was deprived to this widow who was deprived and when you look at that and bring it into the spiritual meaning of it that's what you have in

Jesus he became our next of kin and the epistle to the Hebrews makes a lot of that for example in Hebrews chapter 1 verse the verses there in chapter 1 and 2 of Hebrews where you find Jesus spoken of as having taken our nature he did not take the nature of angels he became flesh and blood he became one of us why did he do that he did that because as our redeemer he became our next of kin humanly speaking to take our predicament to take our needs to take our circumstances to himself to take our sin to take our debt and that's what Christ himself has become he takes on the needs of paying the debts of his people in other words when you find here the ransomed of the Lord the redeemed of the Lord that means the people that God has provided for by becoming their redeemer by taking on himself to pay their debts by taking on himself the responsibility and the rights of a goel of a redeemer to be their next of kin to come right alongside them and to actually provide for them as is required that's where you get the idea of a ransom as well because redemption taking something back or taking up the needs of someone redemption always involves a cost redemption is always something that has to do with paying a price there is a specific sum very often given out in terms of what is necessary for a person to act as a redeemer there's a provision made at a cost now the Bible doesn't actually at all ask the question who is the price paid to right

Jesus paid the price of our sin he paid the ransom he became the ransom but the Bible doesn't then ask well who did Jesus pay the price to it's not about that what the Bible focuses on is the cost itself what it cost to purchase us back for God what it cost God himself in the person of his son to redeem us and nowhere better is that described than in the first letter of Peter chapter 1 and verses 18 and 19 remember says Peter that you are not redeemed by corruptible things such as silver and gold in other words to be redeemed at the payment of a ransom a ransom price for our redemption for our salvation it's not about things like silver and gold but he says by the precious blood of Christ and it's when you look at the words of Jesus himself along with that that you begin to understand what an amazing thing what an astounding thing redemption really is when God has taken on himself the right and the responsibility of being our redeemer what did Jesus say in Mark chapter 10 verse 45 one of the great texts of the Bible one that should be imprinted in our minds Jesus there is dealing in the context of Mark chapter 10 with what it means actually to be a disciple to be a disciple means to be a servant because he contrasts his people with the kings of the Gentiles they are in this world to be served for people to do them favors but it's not going to be like that with you he said the least of you shall become the greatest for he says even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many where is the greatest example of what it means to be a disciple in the redeemer himself because when he took upon himself to become our next of kin the son of

[16 : 44] God took our plight our sin our guilt all the things that are associated with our lostness in our alienation from God he took all of that to himself and the ransom that was paid for setting us free for bringing us back to God was nothing less than his life his death is the one that is the payment the ransom price which secures our deliverance he came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many and when you go to the way Paul brought up the whole concept of being redeemed he builds into it something which in Paul's day also gave some further illustrations to him of what it means to be redeemed because in those days as you know slaves were sold and bought in the marketplace and

Paul builds that into his theology as well because as Paul looked around him he saw lots of things that illustrated redemption and the way that a slave came to be bought by someone who became their master that slave was then tied to that master they became virtually the property of that master they were owned by them well Paul is saying that's how it is in our redemption spiritually Paul Paul is saying that's an illustration and when you bring that into its spiritual setting and you look at the biblical concept of redemption all the way through from the Old Testament Paul is saying for example 1 Corinthians 6 verses 19 to 20 you are not your own for you were bought with a ransom price see there's the same emphasis on redemption but the outcome of that the consequences of that is that we belong to Jesus

Christ who has bought us we are his people when we have come to know him and to accept him and to receive him when we have come to respond to the offer of life in the gospel when we have come to God when on the basis of what he has already done for us in Christ when we accept that when we receive that as the basis of all our hopes then what happens well we become his we're bonded to him his rights become our rights his cause becomes our cause his life becomes our life his heaven becomes our heaven everything that he is as our redeemer becomes ours and it's for us that he died to be our redeemer for us to be his redeemer that's what it means here the ransom of the

Lord the redeemed of the Lord and they shall return and as we saw the return is not just literally the return of Judah or the people of Judah back to Zion from Babylon after a generation away that's then expanded into the whole issue of spiritual redemption they shall return what does it mean it means returning to God it means returning so as to be his people and that's important what are we today as a people gathered together in this hall we're the church of God is it important to be the church of God of course it's important some people will tell you it's not all that important that you can have a church without walls as sometimes it's called yes you can that you can be a Christian at home and just read your Bible for yourself because every church is imperfect and until you find a church that fits in every way like what your own requirements are or what your own specific needs are what your own ideas as to what makes up a church and what a church should be like then you can stay at home well you're not going to get that in this world there is a church like that but it's not in this world it's in heaven what

God is saying to us again and again through his word is that where his word is set as the basis of a worship where we worship him in sincerity and in truth and in dependence on his spirit where his word is proclaimed as the gospel where Christ himself is honored and uplifted where all of these things exist where the sacraments are administered in faithfulness to scripture you have his church and you have the privilege of belonging to that church because to that church I'm not talking here about denominations I'm talking about the church of God the people of God who worship him wherever they are China the UK wherever they are where the people of God worship him that is the church there is God's people you see every time you look through these epistles of Paul as he wrote to these churches how does he introduce them he introduces them to the saints who are in Colossae to the saints that are at

[22 : 18] Corinth to the people who are in other words called out by God and established as a church let's never think too little of the privilege of belonging and being part of the church of God because it gives us great advantages great privileges that's where we learn what it is to worship him that's where we learn what it is to have fellowship with him that's what we learn where we learn the truth of his word and what it means for us that's where we learn what fellowship with other Christians is about that's where we learn the truth of God's own directive do not neglect the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of the involved in a pilgrimage journey they shall return and come to

Zion with singing and if you think of Zion as we've said as something that develops into eventually the city of God in heaven well that fits into the context doesn't it in which we ourselves are involved in a pilgrimage what is a Christian in this life but a pilgrim somebody who's on a journey what are Christians together in this world but a people who are travelling onwards to their home to the city that God has prepared for them and all the way through in that journey they're going to be tested they're going to have difficulties they're going to have joys as well they're going to have times of exhilaration and times of testing and times when they will be cast down and times when they will have many things in their own hearts and their own minds as questions that don't really seem to have an answer it's part of the journey friends it's part of where God has set us until we get home and then the questions if God is pleased to answer them then he'll answer them but certainly as we'll see in a minute there'll be nothing of the wars and the trials and the infirmities and the difficulties of this life so there's the redemption it's by a redeemer it's through a ransom it involves a return and it's a coming to

Zion chapter 35 has the same words as verse 11 here pretty much but there's the idea there of the pilgrimage as well or the journey in verse 8 where it says a highway shall be there of course it's worth reading through the whole of this magnificent chapter here where if you've ever seen a film of a dry arid desert where once maybe perhaps every few years not necessarily even every year but every few years there's a flood of water comes and when it's all speeded up on these wonderful

nature programs that you get nowadays you see this water just making its way and coming to swamp the land and cover the dry land and then out springs the grass and the wonderful verdure the greener that comes up almost magically out of the ground that's how God is when he brings the water of the gospel upon the dry ground of our souls or the water of the gospel into a community that has gone away from

God that's spiritually arid and dry that needs revival that's what happens the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing and that speaks in verse 8 of the highway a highway shall be there and it shall be called the way of holiness and then the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy shall be on their head so you see it's picturing for us this journey this way that God has opened and here in Isaiah 51 remember we saw that there's a reference there to the Exodus as well and to God opening a way there having delivered his people out of Egypt there's the Redeemer he's redeemed his people he's brought them out of the captivity he's brought them into a journey even the Red Sea cannot stand against them when God is with them he takes them through the Red Sea he provides that dry land for them through the Red Sea through the Seas he brings them safely over to the other side they shall return they shall come to Zion they shall come to the place that God has appointed as their terminus where their journey ends where hope ends but they're rejoicing and I don't want to rush it but time is gone but rejoicing itself is an important part of the verse the ransom of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing everlasting joy shall be upon their heads they shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and Zion shall flee away it's a great picture that isn't it of everlasting joy shall be on their heads in the old days like in the great games for example it begins where you've got the beginnings of the Olympic that those who won the races were not crowned with this little laurel wreath or crown that they got until everybody had finished their race

[28 : 18] Hebrews 12 is the picture of that for us all the races were finished and when you finished your own race you went and sat in the crowd and you actually encouraged and cheered on those other races that were following your own one and only when the last of the races was finished did all those who had won actually receive their prize they were then crowned with the victor's crown you've got the idea here here in Isaiah of being crowned as a victor you've finished the journey you've obtained the victory you're now in the city that God has prepared and you're going to receive your crown and here's the wonderful thing it's called the crown of joy you're crowned with rejoicing what an amazing picture that is for people for whom the journey was so difficult at times who experienced such depths of pain and of difficulty of anxiety of soul wrenching in this world

God is saying you keep your eye on this because one day you're going to be crowned and you're going to be crowned with joy it'll be on your heads you'll be carrying it forever experiencing its depths that's why it says also that sorrow and sighing shall flee away you see they're not just leaving of their own accord it's not a picture of sorrow and sighing says well we'd better just make our way out of here they're being banished God has sent them away they have no option but to flee sorrow and sighing shall flee away God is going to banish them completely from this city of heaven from this wonderful final place of dwelling that the people of God will come to at the end of their journey sorrow and sighing shall flee away in this life you and

I are going to have problems some of them will hurt us some of them we can't get our heads round some of them will make us despondent there'll be times when we feel depressed let down questioning times when we're really dragging our feet through mud in this pilgrimage journey that's what God did say that's what Jesus promised so that we wouldn't be caught out by surprise by these difficult times but you know that will be more than made up for by what's awaiting us at the end of the journey sorrow and sighing shall flee away they'll never appear again they don't belong in this spiritual Zion in this city that God has waiting for his people sorrow and sighing they shall flee away

God will have put them and banish them forever and that's why you've got in the book of revelation as we mentioned references to that same thing chapter 7 for example where John saw this great multitude standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands they're the signature of victory the things that show that they have come to be victorious and are now with God and it says that he goes on to say that they were described as those who have come out of the great tribulation out of great suffering they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb therefore they are before the throne of God and

serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat for the

Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd he will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes one of the wonderful things about that is that the Redeemer whom you now cannot see with your eyes is going to be the very one who will dry your tears in glory he himself no one else no one less and that's how the book of Revelation and effectively the Bible ends where in chapter 21 there you've got that great picture again of the new Jerusalem this final abode this place of the redeemed and I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their

[33 : 44] God he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death will be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more for the former things have passed away and he who was seated on the throne said behold I am making all things new the Christian is a new creation but not yet perfect still set in the journey of life which involves much pain but the Christian is designed for a new world and God will have made all things new in the final state that's the destiny of the redeemed that's what they are redeemed for by their redeemer by a ransom that's what he gave his life for that's what the cost of it's all been about that's the eternity of the redeemed as we'll sing in a minute in

Psalms 16 at your right hand oh Lord there are pleasures forever more is that your destiny are you amongst the redeemed do you have Christ as your redeemer is your hope based on shifting sand or on the rock of ages the redeemer who will bring us home to that city of redemption let's pray almighty lord we thank you for that redemption for your claim over us for its offer to us in the gospel we thank you for the cost that you paid we thank you for that death that secured our redemption we pray lord as we come to be confronted in your gospel with the call of the redeemer himself that you will give us this day to respond in faith and acceptance and in praise and adoration hear us we pray for your glory sake amen