

Room To Review 2

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[0 : 00] Our God, we stand before you, and our hearts are known to you. We don't know our own hearts in the same way.

And so we ask that you will, by your word, open our hearts, that we may confront the secrets of our hearts, and that we may know in that the wonder of your love.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. The passage that we're looking at from Isaiah again this morning is the 49th chapter, beginning at the 13th verse.

And you will find it in your pew Bible on page 644.

It begins at the bottom of 644. And it reads this way. Shout for joy, O heavens!

[1 : 22] Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord comforts his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

Now, what you really need to do in order to read any passage of scripture is start at Genesis 1 and work your way up to it.

The Anglican service is designed to help you do that by running through the Tidium and some of the hymns and the psalms, which in a way give you an overview, so that when you have the overview of scripture, then you can focus in on one verse.

And this one verse speaks to you about what happens, what the ultimate reality of our world is, and what it needs to be.

At the bottom and heart of everything is the necessity that the heavens will shout for joy, that the earth will rejoice, and that the mountains will bring tidings of good news, that they will bring to us the best of news.

[2 : 39] And the reason for this is that no matter in what circumstances we are, the reality is that the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

So that's the conclusion that Isaiah draws. Remember that he has the whole of scripture to support this command, as we have the whole of scripture behind what we're doing, gathered as we are in church this morning.

Well, we come to this thing not only from our own, from the scriptures, we also come to this passage from the deep longing of every human heart.

that the fulfillment that we are to find as human beings, and this has nothing to do with nation or language or color or geography, it has to do with being a human being in the vast process of humanity that marches across the centuries.

At the heart of human existence, there needs to be the discovery of the reality that what life is all about is to shout for joy, to rejoice with the earth, to burst into song, and to know that in every circumstance and every situation, the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on them.

[4 : 24] And so we come to this verse, I want you to come to it, from the powerful experience, the powerful experiences of our own lives.

Whether that means that you have been sailing in the Pacific, or whether you have been skiing at Whistler, or whether you've been playing golf in the desert, or whether you've been surfing in Hawaii, or whether you've been fishing in the Queen Charlotte Islands, or whether you've been walking in the Endowment Lands or Stanley Park, whether you have been shoveling out from under a vast snowstorm, the reality of your daily experience, that the sun rises, the rain falls, the seasons rotate, the rivers run, the tides turn, empires pass, time never stands still, corporations take over corporations, fortunes are made, fortunes fail, and in the midst of all of this experienced reality of our lives, the essential business is to shout for joy,

O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, burst into song, O mountains, for the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted...

Now, that's what it's all about. That's what we're to do. That's when we discover what life is all about, when we are lost in wonder, love, and praise for the God for to whom...

Well, when it says, shout for joy, O heavens, it means that they all stand in the presence of God, and so they shout for joy, that the whole of earth, because of God, our Creator, has reason to rejoice, and that the mountains serve the purpose of being, as it were, the pulpit from which the good news of God's grace and mercy goes forth.

[6 : 42] That's what it's all about. But then, alas, the next verse starts with but. And look at what it says.

But, the experience of Zion, and I want you to take Zion to me for the purposes of this morning, us assembled here in this church.

This is the community, and what do we have to say? Not a great shout of rejoicing, but a wail. The Lord has forsaken me.

The Lord has forgotten me. The circumstances of my life are that I am forsaken, and I am forgotten. And that becomes the deep experience of our humanity.

Exploring our forsakenness, exploring the sense that we are forgotten. You know, this same verse 13 of chapter 49 of Isaiah is quoted in Revelation chapter 12.

[7 : 56] He puts it this way. Rejoice then, O heavens, and you that dwell therein. But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great rock, because he knows that his time is short.

So you get the shortness of time that belongs to evil, and the eternal reality that belongs to God.

And we become experienced in the wail of Satan, recognizing that his time is short.

And we so rarely experience the shout of rejoicing because of the eternal reality that God's purpose has for us. Well then, Isaiah goes on to explain how this all works, and he uses some brilliant illustrations, which are all very memorable, the first of which is a child at his mother's breast.

And Isaiah challenges them to consider whether that mother has compassion on the child she has born. And of course, the deepest possible relationship of trust that we experience humanly is that relationship between a mother and child.

And yet, Isaiah says, that relationship could conceivably be broken. But he says, a relationship of trust and confidence and patience waiting upon the Lord will never be broken.

[9 : 41] no matter what, that relationship will stand. The Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on them.

And then, Isaiah goes on to explain further. And the Lord says, through Isaiah, look at my hands.

And on the hands are the self-inflicted wounds of God, so to speak, in which he has reminded himself of his people so that both of his hands are scarred that he will never, ever forget.

I mean, you can imagine two people deeply in love in a sense scarring each other so that they will have that permanent reminder that can't be removed. and so the Lord has both hands scarred to remind him of his commitment to us and to form the basis of our shouting for joy and rejoicing because of that faith.

And, you know, the poignancy of that, of course, is when the risen Lord Jesus meets with his disciples and shows them his scarred hands.

[11 : 11] It's amazing. Think about it. It goes back and then it takes Zion, this city that has said, you have forsaken me.

The Lord has forgotten me. And it takes it in verse 17 and says, the reality of your experience is that your sons will hasten back to you and those who have laid you waste will disappear.

That the ultimate reality will be a gathering again of your people and those who have been against you and wasted you will be destroyed.

You are moving from ruin and desolation to restoration and renewal by reason. That's the direction of our lives and that's the motive for our rejoicing.

And so you are to lift up your eyes and look around and all your sons gather and come to you as surely as I live. There is the gathering of God's people to take part in the rejoicing and thanksgiving and praise and worship.

[12 : 31] And you will, these will be for you, Zion, like ornaments. And it's a picture, you see, of this people of God who in their infidelity to God had been sent into exile and barrenness.

It says, a husband who has divorced his wife, separated from her, has nothing further to do with her, and then brings her back. And the family is restored and the sons are restored and the thing

that seemed impossible happens.

it demonstrates again that the Lord comforts his people finally and has compassion on his people. And that it goes on and says, the children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, this place is too small for us.

Give us more space to live in. You know, that it won't be a matter of living in a narrow and cramped way, but there will be a need for expansion and greater and burgeoning and growth, and all those things will happen because of all the people that come back, because of all the manifestation of the faithfulness of God and the compassion of God towards his people.

[13 : 59] That will be your ultimate experience, not the experience of desolation, and exile will be the experience of coming back.

And then you will say in verse 21 of chapter 49, then you will say in your heart, who bore me these? I was bereaved, I was barren, I was exiled, I was rejected.

Who brought these up? I was left alone. But these, where have they come from? them. And there, you see, Zion, or us, we make the great discovery of our life that the worst of years are the best of years, that the deepest of our afflictions have produced the most profound fruit in our lives, so that we have reason to rejoice even over the experience of bereavement and barrenness of exile and rejection.

From out of this, the fruit of this affliction becomes the best of God's purpose and love, and it is revealed against that background, so that you at the end of your life look back and say the worst of years have been the best of you because of the demonstration of God's faithfulness in the midst of them.

And then there's a tremendous picture beginning in verse 22 of chapter 49.

[15 : 42] And here is the sovereign Lord, and he is speaking, and he says, see, I want you to notice this, I want you to recognize this.

There's a vast battlefield, and skirmishes are going on all the time, and nobody knows who's winning, and nobody knows who's losing, and the battle wages back and forth and back and forth, and discouragement and disillusion and a sense of lostness captures people.

They don't know where to turn, and then what happens in the midst of the battlefield? The Lord lifts up his banner among the people, and they then begin to gather around that.

You know, it's exactly the same picture as from the New Testament when it says, I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. So the Lord lifts up his banner, declares who he is, declares that the victory belongs to him, and all the people come to him.

And those who formerly were the Gentiles and were excluded, those who were princes and queens in their own right, they all come and they fall down before him and acknowledge him to be the Lord, and they join in the song of the heavens, the shout for joy, and the rejoicing on the earth, and the echoing of the glad tidings from the mountains.

[17 : 09] They all come and rejoice with him. And he gives this powerful picture in verse 23 when it says, kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers, those whom you regarded as the highest among men, those who were regarded as the highest in society, the great people.

Where do you find them? You find them with their faces in the dust, acknowledging the Lord, the sovereign God. That's what it says there, and it's not a bad thing that they do that, because all of us must do it.

And Paul picks up that picture in his letter to the Corinthians, when he says, he says, what happens when an unbeliever suddenly sees, as it were, the banner of the Lord go up?

He comes into a church full of people like us, carrying on the way we carry on, and quite rightly, the unbeliever says, you're mad! And turns away.

But then he goes on and comes to the point where, rather than saying, you're mad, he suddenly recognizes that there is some reality here, because he hears not the wail of being forgotten and forsaken, but he begins to hear the reality of the shout, the heavens shouting, the earth rejoicing, and the glad tidings echoing from the mountain, and he begins to hear that, and he begins to recognize that that deep longing in his heart, at the deepest level of his experience, this thing is happening.

[18 : 59] And what does it say of the unbelief? It says exactly what it says of the kings and queens who gather to this banner. It says, he falls on his face, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

You see, that experience will be his. And, you see, it's for this reason that that verse is so terribly important, I think.

It's for this reason that we have to begin by saying, shout for joy. You know, our shouts might be very inarticulate. The prayer book helps us to articulate our shouts a little and to give some form to them.

And the prayer book helps us to join in the rejoicing as the choir sang the T.D.M. We praise thee, O God. We acknowledge thee to be the Lord.

It helps to articulate that shout and to give articulation to our rejoicing and to make clear the message. Because the God, the sovereign Lord of whom Isaiah speaks, we recognize as the one who has demonstrated for all time and eternity that the Lord comforts his people and has compassion on the afflicted one.

[20 : 27] And there is none who can say, I am forsaken and I am forgotten. should we remember in that context perhaps the cry of dereliction from the cross.

Jesus said, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? That's probably the only ultimately legitimate cry of forsakenness in the whole of history.

Because our God has not forsaken her. The emblem of that reality is that his banner, the Lord Jesus Christ, has been lifted up and we've been drawn to him.

And that the essential business of our lives, the thing we are called upon to do, no matter what the circumstances are that may cause us to wail and bemoan our circumstance, over and above that there is the reality and the necessity of our shouting for joy, rejoicing with the earth and singing with the marvelous the praise of our God.

And that's why the hymns are so, such amazing statements. I mean, you're asked to come in here and sing hymns that are way beyond your experience, you know.

[22 : 05] Your ears and your heart are full of the wailing of sorrow about your own circumstances and your own difficulties and your own trials and your own tribulations.

church. And suddenly you're called upon to rejoice, to shout for joy. And George Herbert has written a hymn which expresses it and which is the primary condition of our world and which is to be the primary reality of our lives.

And George Herbert writes and says, let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King. The heavens are not too high, his praise may thither fly.

The earth is not too low, his praises there may grow. Let all the earth in every corner sing, my God and King.

And it's joining in that hymn, answering that invitation to offer to God our whole hearts praise. That that is the center reality of our lives.

[23 : 20] And that is, there is reason for that. And the reason is the fact that God has comforted his people.

He encourages them and gives, has compassion for us in our affliction. It's, it's the work of God the Holy Spirit, who comes into the most private and intimate circumstances of our own personal lives, where we are deeply hurt and deeply wounded and deeply misunderstood.

And he brings comfort to us in our affliction. He brings compassion to us and encourages us.

So we are compelled to shout for joy with the heavens, to rejoice with the earth, and to hear the glad tidings proclaimed from the mountains.

Amen.