

Guest Speaker Mark Prater

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

I first met Mark 11 years ago when I was attending a pastor's college with Sovereign Grace, our family of churches, a one-year boot camp type seminary.

Mark had served for a number of years in Sovereign Grace and had come to encourage us. So we're all these pastor's college students in the midst of the grind. He came to pray for us and to encourage us.

And I was in the pastor's college, as you would expect. I mean, it's a college for pastors, so I was in there learning what pastoral ministry is. Learning what you should do, what you shouldn't do in pastoral ministry.

Learning, I think, the things to believe, you know, the theology, but also skills. But that morning as I was interacting with Mark, I was struck by pastoral ministry in practice.

[1 : 27] You know, in many ways, I was learning pastoral ministry in theory. I had nobody to relate to. I guess I was a pastor in my home and stuff like that. But I got an education in pastoral ministry in practice.

As I interacted with Mark, as he prayed for me and as he taught us, I was struck by Mark's sincere and strong love for the church.

With tears, he called me and compelled me to not merely learn the skills of caring for the church. He called and compelled me to love the church.

And I think, maybe more than anything else, that's what stands out to me about Mark. Is he just loves the church.

And, you know, according to Acts 9, which we studied the other week, what you think about the church actually reveals what you think about Jesus Christ. Not the other way around.

[2 : 34] And it's the love for the church that led Mark to leave his home in Philadelphia in 1996 to plant a church in Pittsburgh. So last night we were talking to him and telling his, he was telling us about his kids and how they are on that journey or we're on that journey with him.

So, too, he's encouraging my kids. It was love for the church that led Mark away from that church he planted in 2002 to return to Philadelphia to serve in a different role.

And support a growing church in covenant fellowship church. It's a love for church that keeps Mark there. So, he's rooted there. He's among the pastoral team at covenant fellowship.

One of a very early church in our family of churches. And it's the love for the church that leads Mark to come and serve little churches like us. In his role as executive director of Sovereign Grace Churches.

And it's just been evident to me. I think this week as we've hung out, as he taught us yesterday, and as we've talked a lot, this man just loves helping and loves serving God's people.

[3 : 44] And, you know, for me, those are the people I trust. And those are the people I want to hear from. I really don't care if you've written a book.

And I don't care about a lot of other things. But if you love Jesus and you love his church, then I want to give you my ear. So, would you give him your ear? And let us welcome Mark Prater.

Thank you, man. That is very kind of you. I don't remember that in the past. It's been a while. Yeah. I'm good.

Yeah. Well, good morning. Thanks. We're having a moment here, Walt and I. I said, I don't think I remember that pastor's college interaction. He goes, well, you know, it's been a long time. I'm an old guy.

I don't remember this kind of stuff. All right. Open your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 60, if you would. Walt, thank you for your kind words. That was very meaningful to me because you did capture rightly, I do love the church.

[4 : 45] The church has changed my life. Of course, Christ has changed my life. But I love the church. It's why I love being here with you. I wanted to come this morning.

When Walt invited me several months ago, I eagerly accepted that invitation because I wanted to come and look you in the eye, so to speak, and personally thank you for being a part of our little small denomination called Sovereign Grace Churches.

And I just don't want to say that sort of in an abbreviated way. I want to illustrate for you why I'm grateful for you and for this church and how you are already strengthening our family of churches in Sovereign Grace.

Just planting this church, Trinity Grace Church, starting it from just a few folks and seeing it grow is an example to our family of churches.

You are here because you love the gospel. You are here because you're committed to the gospel. And you are here because you want to see more people hear the gospel.

[5 : 50] So thank you for your heart for the gospel and the faith that you have to start this church. There's another way specifically I believe you're strengthening us.

We have a lot of churches in suburban areas across the United States and even in the world. We have churches, a few churches in urban areas. But we don't have churches, not many of them, like being planted and started in a community like Athens.

And it's my hope, it's my heart, it's my prayer that we would start more churches in communities like Athens. And so what you're doing in planting this church and starting it is you're providing an example and a model to follow.

So as we have young men in the future that want to plant in communities like yours, I'm going to point them to Walt. I'm going to point them to you and say do what they did because you are starting this church so well.

And your impact is not just here locally in East Tennessee. You're already making an impact throughout the world. So how you have embraced Song Wong Kang who was here in the fall and your desire to go to South Korea this summer to serve his church, that's a wonderful contribution to our partnership that we share.

[7 : 10] Because it's not Sovereign Grace who does missions in Sovereign Grace. It's people in local churches who do missions in Sovereign Grace throughout the world.

And that's what you're doing. Even very early in your church life, you're saying we want to have a gospel impact locally and extra locally. And that's a wonderful example to us.

And it's strengthening us as a family of churches. So I say all that, and I could say a lot more by, I say all that to say thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. All right, Walt asked me to preach from Isaiah chapter 60 this morning, and I'm so glad he did because this chapter I believe is one of the most compelling, mission-minded, hopeful chapters in our Bibles.

Let me just give you a little bit of context of where we're dropping into Isaiah 60. At this point in redemptive history, the nation of Israel has rebelled against God, in part because the kings of Israel did not lead them to follow God.

And as a result, God allows judgment to come. He uses actually a foreign nation, Babylon, to come and really break down and destroy Jerusalem and carry the people of God off into exile in Babylon.

[8 : 27] So Isaiah is a prophet that God uses to call his people to repent, to return to God himself, and to announce, he uses Isaiah to announce what he's about to do in setting his people free from exile, which ultimately points to Jesus Christ and his work of setting us free from sin through the gospel.

In other words, in Isaiah chapter 60, Isaiah is written to a people in exile who are discouraged and disheartened, and chapter 60 prophetically says God's about to deliver you, and after your deliverance, I want you to get a glimpse of what God's going to do.

That's what Isaiah 60 is about. The title of my message is, He has made you beautiful. This isn't a very long chapter. It's only 22 verses, so we're going to read the entire chapter.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you, and nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes all around, and see. They all gather together. They come to you. Your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.

[10 : 07] Then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you.

The wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you. The young camels of Midian and Ephah, all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you.

The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you. They shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house.

Who are those that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastlands shall hope for me. The ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from afar, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel.

[11 : 14] Here's why. Because He has made you beautiful. Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you. For in my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you.

Your gates shall be opened continually. Day and night they shall not be shut. The people may bring to you the wealth of the nations with their kings led in procession.

For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish. Those nations shall be utterly laid waste. The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plain, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet. They shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever. A joy from age to age. You shall suck the milk of nations.

[12 : 31] You shall nurse at the breast of kings, and you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Instead of bronze, I will bring gold. And instead of iron, I will bring silver. Instead of wood, bronze. Instead of stones, iron. And I will make your overseers peace, and your taskmasters righteousness.

Violence shall no more be heard in your land. Devastation or destruction within your borders. You shall call your walls salvation, and your gates praise.

The sun shall be no more your light of day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light. But the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God shall be your glory.

Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself. For the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

[13 : 36] Your people shall all be righteous. They shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.

The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation. I am the Lord. In its time, I will hasten it.

May God bless the preaching of his word. For over 30 years, 66-year-old Larry Hester lived in darkness.

His sight was stolen by a disease that destroyed the photoreceptor cells in both of his eyes. But on October 1st, 2014, through the help of a bionic eye, Hester was able to get a glimpse of the world for the first time in 30 years.

As the lights dimmed in the exam room, Larry fixed his gaze forward and waited nervously. Paul Hahn, a retinal surgeon at the Duke Eye Center in Durham, North Carolina, counted backwards from three and pressed a button, activating Hester's newly implanted bionic eye.

[14 : 52] And when he pressed that button, Hester said, Yes! With a smile on his face, seeing light for the first time since he became blind over 30 years ago.

Oh my goodness, yes! During a follow-up visit, Hester described seeing sights that he had long believed were past memories. And that now revealed a beauty that brought him joy.

A white duck swimming in a pond, the harvest moon, his wife's blue eyes, and the beautiful sunsets that he thought he would never see again. Larry said this, I know that light is so basic, but for one who has lived in darkness, it is truly incredible because it allows you to see so much beauty again.

When light shines into people's lives who have lived in darkness, the text says, utter darkness, there is an exuberant, joyful, life-changing response to the compelling beauty that they see.

And that's what we see here in Isaiah chapter 60. Light has come to those who have lived in thick darkness, and this light is described here in verse 1 as the glory of the Lord that has risen upon the people of God.

[16 : 18] It is a glory, as verse 2 says, a glory that will be seen upon them. So in these verses, Isaiah is announcing the fulfillment of a promise that God made back in Isaiah chapter 4, verse 2, that he would share his glory with his people.

Even when Israel turns to other nations for their glory, and as a result are humiliated and carried off into exile, God still keeps his promise to share his glory with his people.

But the question is, how does he fulfill that promise? He tells us in Isaiah chapter 49, verse 3, that he will fulfill his promise through his servant.

That servant is not just Cyrus of Persia, who, by the way, conquers Babylon and sets Israel free from exile in the year 539 B.C., restoring Israel's glory, but it points to the servant, capital S servant, Jesus Christ, who steps into our darkness and announces it to us in John chapter 8, verse 12, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So as followers of Jesus Christ, we have the light of life because God has shared his glory with us through the person and work of Jesus Christ, who imparts his righteousness to us.

[17 : 50] And that righteousness of Christ, it now shines from our lives. It's why Jesus prays to the Father in John chapter 17, verse 22, this prayer.

The glory that you have given me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. God sharing his glory with Israel, it points forward to Christ who shares his glory with us through the gospel, and it's his glory, as verse 9 says in this chapter, it's his glory, it's his righteousness that has made us beautiful.

See, the world will be brightened by the glory of God in the church where people see a compelling beauty. See, like Larry Hester, when light shines into darkness and it comes into people's lives and it lights up their world, they begin to see a compelling beauty from the church, filled with people who have been made righteous in Christ and it is attractional.

It draws them to the church. So, four aspects of the beauty seen here in Isaiah 60 that I want to draw your attention to. First aspect of the beauty seen here, number one, the beauty that attracts.

God calls Israel in verse 4 to lift up their eyes. Now, remember, they're in exile. They've got their gaze down and he's saying, look what's about to happen.

[19 : 25] Lift up your eyes and see. Well, what is it do they see? Essentially, they see all the nations of the world coming to them, coming to Zion, the city of the Lord.

And the specific names of the countries and nations mentioned there, Midian and Ephah, Sheba, Kedar, Tarshish, those are all spread out geographically. So, it tells you that all the nations of the world are actually being drawn to Jerusalem.

And when Israel sees the nations that are coming to them and they see what they're bringing with them, the text says they are thrilled. They exult.

And that word exult means they open their hearts wide to all of the nations that are coming. Now, did you note what the nations are bringing? It says, your sons and daughters, verse 4.

The abundance of the sea, verse 5, which basically means everything that a ship can carry is coming to them. The nations are bringing their wealth and their camels and their gold and their frankincense, verse 6.

[20 : 29] They're bringing sheep and rams, in verse 7. And Lebanon brings three different kinds of wood and trees, in verse 13. In other words, the nations are bringing what is needed to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

That's what they're bringing with them. But the question is, why? Why are the nations bringing their wealth to Israel? Verse 9 clearly answers that question for us.

Because, why are they bringing it? Verse 9 says, in the second half of that verse, for the name of the Lord your God. That's why they're bringing it. And for the Holy One of Israel, because He, people of God, has made you beautiful.

They're coming because they are attracted by a beauty, the beauty of God, that is now seen upon God's people because God has determined to share His glory with His people.

But what specifically would be attractive about this beauty? Let me just give you, there's several things, let me just give you one from just this book in Isaiah. Example, one example is we see in Isaiah chapter 59, verse 9, that injustice is associated with darkness.

[21 : 48] And the text says in Isaiah 59, verse 9, therefore, justice is far from us and righteousness does not overtake us.

We hope for light and behold darkness and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. That darkness of injustice is contrasted with the light of justice in Isaiah 58, verse 10.

If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light shall, then shall your light shine and arise in the darkness and your gloom will be as the new day.

In other words, Trinity Grace, as you feed the hungry, as you help the helpless, what you do with full circle ministry, for example, and you make right the injustices in your community, and here in East Tennessee, what happens is that you are used as a light that shines into people's darkness and it reveals the glory of God because they see a righteousness from Christ in your life and that is beautiful and it attracts them to the church.

See, doing good works marked by godliness has a beauty that attracts as it shines into a world that is filled with injustice. But this beauty is not just limited to the good works we do, it also includes who we are as people who are in Christ.

[23 : 26] One of the things that I really love about this church and really has affected me about this church is your warmth and your love for people and how you welcome people.

Last year, we did one of our quarterly mission videos in Sovereign Grace about the work that was happening here at Trinity Grace and I was very affected by what Ralph said.

Ralph shared in that video that he had never been around people like this. It's basically what you were saying because they just welcomed you and loved on you and were genuine and authentic with you and it led to Ralph's salvation.

It was wonderful to see Ralph baptized in that video. I share that story because what was Ralph experiencing? He was experiencing Christ who lives in you and Christ who lives in you, it shines from your life and it affects people's lives, people that he is saving and people that he is strengthening.

Christ's likeness, it does this, it transcends generational and racial and ethnic diversity and it reaches all people because it's Christ.

[24 : 42] 1 Peter 3 verse 4 says, but let your adorning, the adorning of this glory, right? But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

See, in a loud social media connected world where turmoil fuels the opinions that are shared freely and frequently with disdain online, there is a beauty that shines from a person who communicates online and face-to-face with a gentle and quiet spirit.

That beauty is rare in our day but it is a beauty that attracts because it is God sharing his glory with his people and so he shines it from your life.

Second aspect of the beauty that we see here is the beauty that transforms. Note what happens with all the nations that are bringing, what the nations are bringing to God's people.

Look at verse 10 with me if you would. Foreigners, so they bring all this stuff with them, right? Foreigners shall build up your walls and their kings shall minister to you.

[26 : 01] So foreigners are using what is being brought by the nations to essentially do this, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the kings of those nations come to minister to God's people.

In other words, the nations come to rebuild God's city and serve God's people but these aren't just sort of your average foreigners and kings. Rather, these are Israel's former enemies.

That's who they are. Verse 10 tells us that these foreigners and kings were actually used by God to strike Israel with his wrath but now in God's favor he has mercy upon his people and he uses these same foreigners and kings to now serve God's people.

Enemies of God are transformed into fellow rebuilders of God's city. That's what you see there in verse 10. Verse 14 tells us that the sons of those who afflicted God's people holding them captive in exile now come bending low as the verse says and those who despise God's people bow down to them because they live in the city of the Lord.

See, oppressors of God's people are transformed into servants who submit to and worship the Holy One of Israel. That's transformation, isn't it?

[27 : 24] Verse 15 tells us that God's people who were hated and forsaken by the nations are now made majestic and so beautiful that all the nations who at one time would not pass through Israel are now being drawn to Israel.

How do we explain this astonishing transformation that we read about? Well, the text answers our question in verse 16. Here's the answer.

Here's the explanation. And you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

So when God's people see former enemies and oppressors coming with the praises of the Lord on their lips, that's what it says there in verse 6, then they know that this transformation has been accomplished by God Himself who is the Savior, the Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

You and I, if we are in Christ, we know this transformation, don't we? We know this transforming work of the Savior. We were former enemies of God, hating Him and hating His people until God worked to show us our need for a Savior and through giving us faith in Christ's finished work in the gospel.

[28 : 47] In that moment, what happened is we were delivered from the domain of darkness, weren't we? And transferred into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. See, the beauty of the gospel is this.

The beauty of the gospel is seen when enemies of God are transformed into friends of God. When haters of God are transformed into lovers of God, then we know, we know without a doubt, it is the work of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and it is a beautiful work.

Jonathan King says this, the objective beauty of the person of Christ, the beauty of the work of Christ, and the beauty of Christ's work ongoing through the Holy Spirit are the preeminent aspects of God's beautiful self-showing.

So the transforming work of the gospel accomplished by Christ through his death and resurrection that transforms enemies of God into servants and worshipers of God, that is a preeminent aspect of God's beauty.

And it's a beauty that continues today. It's why you're starting this church. It's why you exist, Trinity Grace. You are here to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 09] It will transform people's lives. And what I want you to hear today, it is a beautiful work that reveals the beauty of God himself. Third aspect of the beauty that we see here, the beauty of reaching the nations.

The beauty of reaching the nations. A major theme that I'm sure that you saw in this chapter as we read it is that all of the nations are being drawn, of course, to the city of the Lord, to Jerusalem in Isaiah's day, but that we know as people of Christ that there is an ongoing work of the nations being drawn to Christ in our day, right?

An aspect of the beauty of the work of Christ seen here in Isaiah 60 is that he fulfills this promise that God made to Abraham very early in our Bibles, Genesis chapter 12 verse 3, where he says to Abraham, in you all the nations will be blessed.

This blessing extends not only to Abraham's physical descendants, but all who, as Paul tells us in Galatians 3 and Walt pointed out to you last week in his message, are children of Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- [31 : 37] It tells us that the gospel reaches everyone, right? And if you are Christ then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. So God's promise to Abraham to bless all nations is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ where the blessing of salvation is offered to people from all nations.

Isaiah chapter 60 then is a glorious picture of worldwide revival. That's what it's a picture of where God is at work saving Jew and Gentile, saving people from every tribe and tongue and nation by the power of the gospel.

See Christ's mission is not limited to geographic or cultural or generational or ethnic or racial barriers but it transcends all of them as Walt pointed out so well last week and that brothers and sisters, that's beautiful.

It's like, unlike anything else, Jonathan King again says this, the son's mission and work is beautiful always and everywhere to everyone who has eyes to see it.

See mission, gospel mission is a beautiful work because we show everyone, everywhere, the beauty of Christ and we tell them about the transformational work of Christ in the gospel.

- [32 : 59] Now, you can read Isaiah 60 individually, you can read it together as a family, a church family and you can think, man, this picture of worldwide revival, that seems way beyond us.

That seems really big. I mean, we're just trying to start a church here in Athens, Tennessee. That's right. It can raise questions like, how can we reach the nations, right?

How can we do all of that? Well, I want you to see something in this chapter. It's the very last verse. Verse 22, read that with me.

The least one shall become a clan and the smallest one a mighty nation. I am the Lord. In its time, I will hasten it.

What verse 22 tells us is that there is a gospel influence that is disproportionate to your size. That's what it tells us, right?

- [33 : 59] It doesn't matter what size of church you are. This verse tells you by the power of God you can have a worldwide influence. I got an email back in July from Greg Durenberger.

Greg, started like you, started a church five years ago in Sioux Falls, South Dakota called Emmaus Road Church. Church.

It's one of the churches in our denomination. He said this, right from the beginning as they started Emmaus Road Church, they actually prayed Isaiah chapter 60 verses 1 through 3.

They just prayed that God would bring the nations to Emmaus Road Church and that somehow they would be involved in sending some of those people back to their nations to bring the gospel. Greg then said that in recent months members of his church have been engaging and befriending people from Somalia, Sudan, Eritaria, which is in northeast Africa, Ghana, Libya, and China who have moved to Sioux Falls really as refugees, many of them, and not one of them that they've engaged knows Jesus Christ.

Not one of them. Greg's wife, Lori, told them a story just that week where one of the ladies from Ghana told Lori this. She said this to Lori, I feel very comfortable talking to you.

[35 : 19] It struck me. You ever notice as you read through the gospels how people who didn't know Jesus as their savior, they felt very comfortable talking to him? Samaritan woman at the well, Zacchaeus, he had to climb out of that tree and bring Jesus to his house, right?

People felt comfortable talking to Jesus. See, the woman from Ghana, despite cultural and ethnic differences, feels comfortable talking to Lori Derenberger because Jesus lives in Lori, because Christ shines from her life.

This woman from Ghana is getting a glimpse of the beauty of Christ and Lori is praying that it would lead to her knowing Christ as her savior.

I tell you this story for a couple of reasons. First, Emmaus Road Church is not this mega church. It's probably about 170 people. You don't have to be a big church to reach the nations for the gospel.

You just need to have faith in the gospel and believe this, that you can have a gospel impact that's disproportionate to your size. Second, Emmaus Road Church didn't have a big plan to reach the nations.

[36 : 30] They didn't have a map of the world on the wall with all these pins in it. What did they do? They just prayed. They just prayed that God would bring the nations and somehow they might be sending some of those people out to reach the nations.

See, may this picture of worldwide revival that we see here in Isaiah 60, may it not intimidate us as a local church or as a family of churches, but let us do this.

May it stir big prayers. May we pray big prayers to God, asking God to bring the nations to us, to bring the nations to Trinity Grace, believing that the gospel will transform those people's lives and make them former enemies of God into worshipers of God.

And by the way, thank you, Trinity Grace Church, for already doing this. I mentioned this earlier. You are already participating in gospel mission beyond your East Tennessee locale, just the way, again, that you've embraced Song One and you've begun to develop a relationship with Lord's Grace Church and soul.

The mission trip that you'll be making this summer, I can't wait to hear the stories from that. That's a wonderful expression of your commitment to the gospel and it is a way that the Lord's, I believe, going to use you to reach the nations.

[37 : 56] Walt asked that I would just take a moment here, though, and connect what you're doing in soul this summer and you're going to hear more about a church plant in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Michael Granger that you're going to be praying for.

I want to connect all of that to what's happening in the broader work of Sovereign Grace. So right now, we are doing work in six continents, in 27 countries, and with 300 plus churches who are not a part of Sovereign Grace at this point but have interest that represent about 58,000 people.

We just adopted a church in Salau, Mexico which, as all I understand, is about a 12-hour bus ride south of Juarez is what that means. A wonderful man, Manolo Quintal, became the first Mexican pastor who went through our new ordination process.

We celebrated that at the pastor's conference. A wonderful man. We have two churches in Cuba that want to be adopted, five churches in Liberia, which is in Western Africa, that are asking to be adopted into Sovereign Grace.

Diano Thomas is the leader there and he says, I want to start Sovereign Grace churches of West Africa. That's humbling to hear. There are 20 churches in the Philippines that are asking to be adopted. We don't know how to manage that.

[39 : 09] Like, if we adopted all 20 of those all at once, it probably wouldn't be the right thing to do. So we just need wisdom. 80 people attended a Pastors and Wives conference just this past spring that was led by Sovereign Grace pastors.

There are 16 churches in Nepal that are asking to be adopted into Sovereign Grace and I hope we can adopt a few of them because we heard from Barnabas who's a pastor from Nepal at the Pastors Conference and we're going to learn from him because there was a law last year passed in Nepal that it's illegal to share the gospel.

So if you're caught sharing the gospel in Nepal, it's a mandatory three-year prison term. And if you're caught baptizing a new believer, it's a five-year prison term. And actually, be affected by this example.

Barnabas said part of his pastoral duties now include going to prison and getting his people out on bail because despite that law, they're not going to stop sharing the gospel. And some of them are getting arrested for sharing the gospel.

And he goes in and he tries to get them out so they can continue to share the gospel. We're going to learn much more from Barnabas than any ways we can serve him.

[40 : 21] I just share all that because I wanted to give you an idea just to what's happening. Just a glimpse in sovereign grace that you are connected to and what you do is so important.

Let us believe and pray that our gospel impact will be disproportionate to our size, right? Fourth and last aspect of the beauty that we see here, the beauty that fulfills.

In verse 17, we see a change where no longer are the nations bringing their wealth. Rather, the personal pronoun I is being used so that God is providing what is best to build the walls of this city that are called salvation and the gates praise.

Look at the description of this city in verses 17 through 21. Instead of bronze, I, God, will bring gold. And instead of iron, I will bring silver.

Instead of wood, bronze. Instead of stones, iron. I'll make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in your land. Devastation or destruction within your borders.

[41 : 29] You should call your walls salvation, your gates praise. The sun shall no more be your light of day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light. Why? Because the Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory.

Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord will be your everlasting light. And your days of mourning shall be ended.

Your people shall be, all be righteous, and they shall possess the land forever. The branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.

See, this chapter not only speaks about the rebuilding historically of the city of Jerusalem after exile, but it points also to the new Jerusalem that will come when Jesus Christ returns.

We know that because the gold and the silver and the bronze and iron are simply words that give us imagery that points to a city that is made of the best, that has a permanence that time cannot erode, provide a security that no enemy can break through, shines with a light that is everlasting, and it is a city that is marked by joy, righteousness, peace, and beauty.

[42 : 46] The descriptions of heaven that are found here in these verses tell us that heaven will be beautiful. It will blow our minds away. And the most beautiful thing about heaven, these verses tell us, will be God himself.

We know that from verse 19. Look at verse 19 again. The sun shall no more be your light by day, nor your brightness shall the moon give you light, but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God shall be your glory.

That word glory there means beauty. That God will be your beauty. God is the most beautiful thing that we will see and enjoy and savor in heaven.

Wayne Grudem says this, God's beauty is that attribute of God whereby he is the sum of all the desirable qualities. If God has everything that is desirable, then all of our good and righteous desires find their ultimate fulfillment in God and no one else.

See, only God's beauty can fulfill and satisfy our good and righteous desires. See, one of the many joys of heaven will be that ongoing fulfillment of those desires as we eternally gaze upon the beauty of our God.

[44 : 10] I believe it's why John Newton wrote this verse in Amazing Grace. When we've been there 10,000 years, bright, talking about brightness, right?

Bright, shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun. Praise is the result of our desires being fulfilled in heaven that shines with the matchless beauty of God.

So, until that day, may you continue to get a taste of heaven as you gather here each Sunday morning, Trinity of Grace Church. You're getting a glimpse of the beauty of God and you're responding in praise.

Continue to be a church that opens your hearts wide to the nations as you shine the glory of Christ from this place. May it be a beacon of light.

May you be a beacon of light that shines into the darkness and reaches people when the lights come on who say like Larry Hester, yes!

[45 : 15] Oh my goodness, yes! I see the beauty of Christ. Trinity of Grace Church, continue with renewed faith to fulfill the great commission that Christ has given us to make disciples of all nations where we believe with even more faith that the gospel will transform enemies of God into fellow worshipers of God and that your gospel impact will be disproportionate to your size.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for this church. I thank you for their heart for Christ. And I pray that this church, I pray that our family of churches would participate not only in the great commission but for a worldwide revival.

Lord, we pray that the transforming work of the gospel would be done here in Athens and in East Tennessee and throughout our nation and throughout the world.

We pray that there would be more worshipers that would join us on that day and savor and enjoy the beauty of God. Do all of that for your glory, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.