

Sing!

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to see you all here. Do you want to say it's nice and relatively cool compared to the last couple of weeks? But if you find yourself overheated, don't forget there's water out here.

And if you need air conditioning, you can watch the rest of the service in a live stream downstairs in the Fellowship Hall classroom. So the ushers can, if you go out this doorway, the usherers can help you find that.

Just if you find yourself overcome, please avail yourself of those things. I want to begin by telling you that I grew up with golden retrievers.

And one of the great joys of life is coming home to a golden retriever because they do their happy dance. Have you ever seen a golden retriever happy dance? They jump up and down, they chase their tails, they whimper in joy.

It is, there is nothing like that, like the joyful happy dance of a welcome home from a golden retriever. And therefore, it was striking one day, and this happened a couple of times, but I remember we came home one time and there was no happy dance.

[1 : 10] We came in, pretty, how are you doing? And she came and she slunk into the room with her head low, kind of looking up at us with a hanged dog face. And I don't remember what she had done.

She had done her business on the carpet or eating the Christmas cookies or it was something like that. She knew she had done something she shouldn't have. She knew that she was guilty. She knew she would likely face a reprimand.

And she was covered with guilt and shame and uncertain as to how she would be received. I tell this story because I think that it's part of a human experience that we have often found ourselves in a similar situation.

Walked into a locker room after giving up the penalty kick to lose the game. You've lied to a friend and they found out.

And you meet them for coffee. You lost your temper, broke something of deep sentimental value in your home, and you have to face your spouse. Maybe it's not these things, but probably you can imagine those moments where you knew you blew it, where you feel the shame and you're uncertain as to how you will be received.

[2 : 27] Oh, I know. We're good at it. We're good at trying to avoid this moment because we hate it. We're really good at minimizing. We're really good at justifying ourselves. We're really good at blaming others.

But in those moments when we actually take ownership, when we truly admit what we have done, we ask the question, will we be welcomed back because of that?

I don't think this is just a human experience in our relationships with one another. I believe this is a human experience in our relationship with God as well. For the God of the Bible, if we walked into, or if He walked into our life right now, what would happen?

The person who walks in who knows everything we have ever done. He knows every thought. He knows every intention of your heart. He knows every motive.

Even the things you filtered out and didn't actually act on or didn't actually do. The things that have welled up in you. And as we heard last week, we know that we have gone astray from God.

[3 : 40] And that we deserve nothing from Him but reprimand. And in those moments, we wonder, how will we be received by God?

How does He want us to return to Him? Do we return to Him with a hangdog face, slinking in, fearful and uncertain?

Amen. This is actually where we are at in the book of Isaiah as well. We've been in a series in the book of Isaiah, chapters 40 through 55. If you want to turn there, I totally forgot.

It's page 585. 575. Thank you, Tyler. 575 in the Pew Bible. And if you remember, this is a beautiful section of Scripture where God is speaking words of comfort to His people while they're in exile.

They have blown it. And they have experienced the reprimand of God by being sent off into the Babylonian exile. And He's speaking to them in that moment.

[4 : 49] Words of hope and comfort. What is the word of hope and comfort this morning? What is the word that He calls to us? How does God want us to approach Him?

Well, let's look at it. Let's read together. And then we will dive in. So, let's read Isaiah 54 together. And then we'll pray. Sing, O barren one who did not bear.

Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor. For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married, says the Lord.

Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out. Do not hold back. Lengthen the cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left.

And your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. Fear not. For you will not be ashamed.

[5 : 52] Do not be confounded. For you will not be disgraced. For you will forget the shame of your youth and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

For your maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is his name. And the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. The God of the whole earth he is called.

For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit. Like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you.

But with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you. But with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer.

This is like the days of Noah to me as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth. So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you.

[6 : 58] For the mountains may depart and the hills may be removed. But my steadfast love shall not depart from you. My covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you.

Oh, afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted. Behold, I will set your stones in antimony. And lay your foundations with sapphires.

I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncle, and all your wall of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord.

And great shall be the peace of your children. In righteousness you shall be established. You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear. Nor from terror, for it shall not come near you.

If anyone stirs up strife, it is not for me. Whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you. Behold, I have created the smith who blows on the fire of coals and produces the weapons for its purpose.

[8 : 03] I have also created the ravager to destroy. No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed. And you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. And their vindication from me declares the Lord. Let's pray together. Lord, thank you for this word.

Thank you for the encouragement that it is. And the reminder of what kind of God you are. Lord, we pray that you would open our hearts this morning to receive your word. Lord, I pray for your enablement.

That I might speak your word clearly and faithfully. And Lord, that together, Lord, you might do powerful, transforming work in our hearts this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So how do we return to God? Isaiah gives the people one command and two reasons why we can fulfill this command in this passage.

[9 : 06] The one command is seen in verses 1 through 3. The command on how do we return to God. We are to return to God rejoicing in expectant faith. Why do I say that?

If you look at it, verses 1 through 3. This chapter is, as we launch into it, it is a response to what we heard last week. And if you weren't here last week, let me encourage you. Go to our website and listen to John's sermon on Isaiah 52 and 53.

On the person and the work of Jesus, the suffering servant who came to redeem God's people from their sin. This is the basic message. And this is about how do we respond to that.

In light of that, how do we respond? Not with hangdog face. Not with shame and guilt. Wondering if we're going to be received. But Isaiah says, come and sing.

Sing to the Lord. Have you ever had such good news that you just wanted to burst forth in singing? I grew up in Boston, so I'm a Red Sox fan. Sorry for all of you Yankees fans out there.

[10 : 08] But maybe you can get... Do you know what it was like in 2004 when after 108 years, the Red Sox finally won the World Series? They were singing on Yawkey Way.

Just a bunch of guys and gals who just were so happy about this great news that the Red Sox had won. They burst into song in the streets of Boston.

Listen, God says, because of what the sovereign servant has done, you have a much greater reason to burst into song and to sing with great praise to this God.

He says, don't only just sing, but prepare and position yourself with expectant faith to see what God is going to do. He uses this imagery of expanding your tent.

And he's speaking. He uses this imagery of people who were barren, who didn't have children, who had no family. And he says, do you know what I'm doing with my suffering servant? I'm creating a new people.

[11 : 12] I'm creating a new family, and you're going to be a part of it. And you who felt like you were alone and without hope and desolate. God is going to bring you into something greater than that.

Something that will cause you to sing. So come with expectant faith. Make room at your table, is what he's saying by strengthening your cords and your pegs. He's saying, make a bigger tent, because there's going to be more people welcoming in and streaming in because of what God has done.

This is what Isaiah says. This is how we're to come to God in light of what he has done for us in Jesus. And remember, this is spoken to a group of people who are at their lowest point.

They're in exile. They've been scattered. They're oppressed. Their holy city has been destroyed. Their temple has been destroyed. Their king has been captured. And they know that they've been under the heavy hand of God's right punishment.

And they're wondering, what is going to happen from here? And Isaiah says, because of what I'm going to do in the suffering servant, you can return to me with song, with singing, and with expectant hope that I'm going to do this great thing.

[12 : 28] Friends, I wonder how far we fall from having this kind of expectant, joyful heart. I wonder how easy it is for us to get discouraged when we see the failures around us and when we see the failures in our own heart.

When we struggle and wonder, if I've blown it, can I really do that? Can I believe that God is going to do a new thing? Lijian, thank you for your testimony.

What a beautiful, beautiful picture of God doing wonderful and new things in our hearts. He can do this and He is doing this among us and around us.

And we have the joy of not looking ahead in future hope of this suffering servant, but we look back on the finished work of Jesus.

We look back in history and know that He did come and that He did live and that He did die and that He did rise from the dead. And because of that, we are certain, confident, sure that God has done these things.

[13 : 44] And though, as we will see, we are still waiting for the fulfillment of it in all of its fullness, yet now we know and are able to taste and see that God is on the move doing these great things.

And because of that, we can have this kind of joy and faith. Friends, I just want you to think for a minute, how would your prayer life change if this were true?

Do you pray for God to be enlarging the tent of His family? How would this help you as you're facing various difficulties and trials?

To have a heart that's full of a song because of what God has done and is doing. Think about how it would change your worship in your family.

Do you sing together as a family? Do you sing by yourself? Do you listen to music? Do you let the gift of music lead your heart to meditate on the greatness and the beauty of God?

[14 : 48] And it doesn't all have to be worship music. Brahms can lead you to that. Even Coldplay might be able to. But let music point you to God.

And let your heart be full of singing. This is the command in this passage. In light of what God has done, sing. But then he goes on and he gives us two reasons, two causes, two more things.

And it's specifically about how the work of the suffering servant plays itself out and meets us in our place of shame and guilt and fear and brings us back to him.

The first one is in verses four through ten. These verses begin with the exhortation, don't be afraid. What is the fear? We talked about this already. The fear is that because of our shame, we won't be received.

Now I want to speak just a minute about the experience of shame in the human heart because this is important. Some of us experience shame because other people have shamed us. And they've shamed us for bad reasons.

[15 : 55] They've shamed us for insubstantive reasons. And if this has been true in our growing up or in a significant relationship, sometimes we internalize that.

And it becomes a framework in which we see ourselves and everything else. It is deeply unhealthy. There is some shame, however, that we experience because we have done shameful things.

And the feeling of shame in light of that is a proper one of recognizing we have done something wrong. And yet even that shame can become a prison for us where we think, I've blown it and I'm never going to get out of this.

And this is the fear. The fear that what other people tell me I am, I'm nothing, I'm worthless, I'm no good, I'll never be accepted. Or I know what I've done and I think I'm worthless, I'm nothing, I'm no good.

This is the fear that Isaiah is addressing when he says, don't be afraid. He pictures this shame in the person of a woman, particularly a wife.

[17 : 07] A wife who is alone, a wife who is helpless, a wife who is widowed and therefore without standing in the world that she lives in. And it is actually a fairly sympathetic picture.

One saying this is a person who is helpless and abandoned. Even though we know from chapter 50 that the woman, which is a symbol for Israel, has actually rejected her spouse and left him and run after other lovers.

And so we know from the greater story that Israel is not without guilt. But here it is a compassionate picture of her to see her as someone who is vulnerable and needy.

And in this picture, God speaks. Verse 5. For your maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is his name.

The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. The God of the whole earth he is called. The Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.

[18 : 14] For a moment, brief moment, I deserted you, but with great compassion, I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment, I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love, I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.

Because of what the suffering servant has done for us, he bore our shame, if you remember from chapter 53. Because he bore our shame, you will not be ashamed.

Because he bore our disgrace, you will not be disgraced. You are literally brought back from that into a place of grace.

Your shame will be forgotten and you will be received. You will be received by the Lord as a husband who welcomes back or who pursues and calls into himself a woman who is vulnerable, a woman who is alone, a woman who is in need.

Now, I do want to make sure, really briefly, that we don't get confused. This is imagery, and it's a part of a broader biblical imagery about God being a husband to his people and the people being like a wife who responds to his initiating love and grace in goodness.

[19 : 36] Okay? Not all husbands are virtuous pursuers and not all wives are wayward women. And I just want to make sure men recognize you are God's bride.

Okay? This is a striking thing for us to recognize that we collectively are the bride of Christ. Who need a husband who is going to come and cover us with his compassion.

Who will come and call us back to himself. Who will come and wipe away our shame and our disgrace and embrace us. For we are like the prodigal son on his way back from the sty.

We wonder, how will my father receive me? I'll tell him, I'm willing to be your servant if I can find just a place in your household. And the God here says, no, I've chosen you.

I've loved you. I am your husband. I'm calling you back to me. And I will cover you with compassion. And when you run down the road, I will run to greet you.

[20 : 58] And I will embrace you. And I will love you. Not because you deserve it. But because I have set my love on you. Verses 9 and 10 say, this is like in the days of Noah.

I had to destroy the whole world because of the wickedness. And yet, I had compassion on humanity. And I set a bow in the sky. A rainbow is a reminder of a covenant.

A covenant promise that I would make that I would not destroy the world again like this. And just as you, Israel, have gone through the judgment of exile, so now I will bring you back.

And I will bring you back in a way that will be established forever in new and unshakable ways. Through the work of the suffering servant. Through Jesus. This is what God is doing.

He says, I have done all that you need to return to me in peace. Remember what we learned last? Jesus took the violence of judgment.

[22 : 02] Jesus took the depths of God's wrath poured out on him. Jesus took the face being turned away from him on the cross. So that we could be gathered in.

So that we could be brought in and embraced as God's people forever. I wonder, friends, as we think about applying, if our God is too small for us to come to him.

Is your God like a policeman ready to catch you when you slip up? Is your God like an angry father liable to burst out in wrath at your sin in violent punishment?

Is your God a cold and distant disciplinarian who will leave you to wallow in the consequences of your foolishness? Is he an overbearing taskmaster, demands perfection, and drives you without mercy?

If your God is like this, then it would be a fearful thing indeed to come to him. If these things were true, then of course we would cower before God and stay far away.

[23 : 21] If these things are true, why would we come to God at all, let alone sing? But friends, the God of the Bible is far more complex, far more rich, and far more glorious than that.

He is a creator God to whom all creation is accountable. And he is a loving God who patiently pursues his own creation to redeem them back to himself.

He is a holy God who cannot tolerate sin nor allow evil to stand, but he is a redeeming God who seeks to restore the very people who have rebelled against him. He is a righteous judge who cannot simply overlook evil or wave it away.

But he is an initiating God who sends his son Jesus to take the punishment that we deserve so that he might redeem us to himself. He is a gracious God who does not treat us as our sins deserve, but gives us beauty for ashes, embrace in the face of our rebellion, and gives us joy in the midst of our desolation.

Friends, this is the good news of the gospel. This is the love of God shown for us in Jesus. This is the good news of God.

[25 : 04] Not only does he restore this relationship with us, not only does he give us this restored intimacy and position with him, but he also makes us secure in the kingdom.

Verses 11 through 17 is this picture of a city being rebuilt, right? And he uses imagery. We had to look up. We were laughing in the office this week. We had to look up what a carbuncle is.

If you're a medical person, you think a carbuncle is a boil, because that's what Mayo Clinic says a carbuncle is. In fact, it was also used for a precious stone in older English language that tends to be round and red, maybe like a boil.

So, this is, but the picture here is the rebuilding of a city. And remember, to Isaiah's audience, their capital city, Jerusalem, had, the walls had been broken, and the city had been sacked, and it was a desolate place.

And God says, I am going to rebuild this city. I'm going to rebuild a place of security. And it's not just a place of security, but it's a place which is the symbol of a thriving kingdom, right?

[26 : 17] The thriving capital, Jerusalem, is the center of a thriving kingdom, the kingdom of God in the world, right? And in the Old Testament, it had this nation state, physical place.

And so, he's using that image to say, I will restore these things. And I will not only restore it, but I will restore it in beauty as well as in strength, right? It is a picture of solid foundations.

It's a picture of great beauty. The imagery is not easy. All the footnotes tell you that, yeah, Hebrew scholars are making their best guess at what some of these words really indicate.

And so, let's just recognize what the, but the overall picture seems to be really clear. Right? Verses 12 and 13, the beauty of the stones and the solidity of the foundation.

Verses 13 and 14 talk about the place where children are taught in peace and where righteousness, that is the right ordering of life under God's rule prevails, right?

[27 : 20] A contrast to exile when everything was scattered and the city was broken. Verses 15 through 17, God promises a kingdom where the terrors of the world no longer have any power, right?

The enemies will no longer come from God. Even though he used Assyria and he used Babylon as instruments of judgment against his people, he will no longer do that in the same way.

He says, no power in the world, no matter how threatening, can prevail against my people living in my kingdom. No weapon that's fashioned against you shall succeed.

It's like God is saying, I'm going to put Rivendell and Minas Tirith from the Lord of the Rings together into one place and I'm going to welcome you in.

Rivendell being this place of beauty and of art and of music and of peace. Minas Tirith being this impenetrable citadel where the gates are strong and the walls are high.

[28 : 20] And it's so well defended that it has never been breached. And God is saying, this is my kingdom and I'm inviting you in to the beauty and the security of being a part of my kingdom.

So not only a relationship with God, but a place and a part in his kingdom is what God invites us to. And God calls us to.

And God promises us. As he calls us back to himself. Now, friends, we might sit here and think, okay, that sounds great.

Where is it? I'll buy the ticket tomorrow. I don't care how much it costs. If I can get there tomorrow, I want to be there. And we know in the unfolding of scripture that there is a now or not yet.

We're going to start preaching through the gospel of Mark in two weeks. And the gospel of Mark is the gospel of the arrival of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. And we know that Jesus came and inaugurated.

[29 : 25] That is, he began the kingdom of God. And through his life, death, and resurrection, he established this kingdom by defeating the enemies of sin and death. But he did not establish his kingdom fully in every place.

Because we see that God's rule is not enacted in every part of the world yet. And so, in this in-between time, this time between now and the not yet, what kind of security do we have?

Some of the security is in the future. We know what happens. Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him. I know that no matter what happens to me in my life, because of Jesus, if I am his, I know that I will be a part of his kingdom forever.

That though I die, I will live with him forever. And that is great news. And that is a security that allows us to navigate all sorts of things in this life. So there's a future certainty of those things.

But there's also a present help. There's a present help in knowing these future things. In knowing that even now, we are members of his kingdom. Even now, we are able to have the foretaste of the beauty of his kingdom.

[30 : 36] To know peace with him. To know the beauty of his kingdom. To see the world through his lens. And to see his kingdom through his church slowly expanding.

Right? And the church is not a perfect expression of these things. We know that. And yet it is the vehicle through which God is establishing his kingdom. And building it more and more towards this kingdom.

That he will finally and fully come when Jesus returns. And the security that we have now is that we are a part of this thread that cannot be broken.

And will lead us through whatever we face into this eternity that will be more glorious and more beautiful. And that is the reason why we sing.

The elves in the Lord of the Rings sing. Because they've tasted the beauty of Valinor.

[31 : 34] The heavenly realms. The place where all is right. And because they know they're going there one day. Friends, we need to sing. Because we know.

Because in Jesus, we have a taste. And we see the reality of God's kingdom established. The reality of our relationship with God restored. And this is the great joy.

This is what we sing about. Friends, this is why we gather every Sunday and sing songs. I don't know if you've thought about it. Tyler mentioned it. It's weird. If you've invited a friend who hasn't ever been to church, they're like, you sing?

That's weird. Why do you sing? Because it's a gift that God has given us. So that we might express to Him the joy of knowing and experiencing what He has done for us.

And what it means to know Him and live in relationship with Him. So friends, let us be those who sing. If you're here this morning and you're thinking that sounds too good to be true.

[32 : 40] Come talk to me afterwards. Because I'd love to share with you more about what Isaiah 52 and 53 are about. And how it is that we can be so confident and so certain of what God has done.

Let us be those who sing. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank You this morning for this Word. Lord, we thank You for the God that You are.

Lord, that You are our Maker and our Husband. That You are a Holy One of Israel, our Redeemer. That You are the Maker, the Creator of the whole world.

And Lord, yet You are the one who sent Your Son to die for us. Oh, Jesus, we pray today that we would take this into our heart.

Lord, that You would meet us and take away our shame and our disgrace. Take away our fear. And Lord, help us to know with greater certainty Your love and grace for us in Jesus.

[33 : 57] Thank You, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.