

## Isaiah Chapters 61-62 – John Karmelich

1. My lesson title this week is the questions, "What's in store for us when Jesus returns? What'll we do all day after we're resurrected?" In other words, what's the eternal benefit of betting that Jesus is God?" To commit our lives to serving Jesus means we have to choose to follow Him and reject other options of what we may want to do on any given moment. Yes we have to think and live a certain way in order to be a good witness for Him, but what I'm pondering here is the question of "Is it worth it?" Yes of course we're forgiven of all our sins and yes we'll be in heaven forever. As wonderful as that is, is that it? What's the prize for living that way? Are we going to kick back on a couch somewhere in heaven, and watch television all day? The answer is no. How we're called to live now is a model of how we're called to live eternally. We'll appreciate our eternal rewards, when we choose to live, as God desires we live today. That's what these chapters get into.
2. One of the most fascinating things about the start of Chapter 61 is that Jesus quotes the first verse and part of the second one. He then claimed at that moment, those verses are written about Him and they were being fulfilled then and there. The interesting thing to me is that Jesus stopped on a comma. Technically there were no commas in the original text, but the point is He stopped at a point between the fact He will pay the price for our sins and (big "AND") the day of vengeance of God. In other words the time gap of that comma, has now lasted 2,000 years and counting. Since Jesus has not "set up shop yet" in Jerusalem, the events of Jesus Second Coming haven't begun as it has been described throughout this book and predicted all through the bible. To share a classic point about the bible as a whole, more verses are dedicated to the events of Jesus' Second Coming then there to the events (think Gospels) of Jesus First coming.
  - a) After that comma, the rest of the chapter and the flow of the rest of the book gets into the issue of what will life be like when Jesus "set's up shop" as I like to call it. What do we do when all of that occurs? As my lesson title asks, what does God have in store for us, when He returns? Do we just stand there and watch? Are we involved? Yes we get the idea we are saved, but what do we do after that?
  - b) All that leads to my favorite question in most my bible studies, "Now what?" For those of you who don't know, these lessons are not primarily written for the nonbeliever. There's a lot of places one can go on the internet for example to debate whether or not Christianity's the only way to approach God. That debate is not my primary concern although I do give the Gospel message pretty regularly in these studies. These lessons are written for those of us who believe Jesus is God, He died for every sin we've ever done or will do, and we also believe He's "LORD" (in charge) of our life. My big question is "Now what?" What I want to understand is if we'll get this big reward for trusting in Jesus, how do we prepare for it? If we believe Jesus is God and we'll get rewarded one day for it, what should we be doing now in preparation for that reward?
  - c) So glad you asked. The short version is we should be using our lives to make a difference for Him until "all of this happens". Living the Christian life is not about trying to impress God by our works, but to live enough where, "If it were a crime to be a Christian we'd be arrested for it." I'm also aware there are people reading these studies in places where it is illegal to be a Christian. In such a case, one still has to be a good witness for Him, but also be careful enough in how to handle that situation. For the rest of us, God wants us to live under His rules not to earn His love but because it's the best way to be a witness for Him.
3. OK, now that I've got my "standard disclaimers" out of my system, let's talk a more about what it is that's "worth it" to be a follower of Jesus. What do these chapters actually tell us? For starters, it is the reminder that what is "ruined" will be rebuilt. Yes it refers to the city of Jerusalem, as it'll be the center of where Jesus rules the world. I also think of the "ruins" as the damage done by the non-believers to the world God has created and Him restoring the world to the way He intended it to be. In other words, most things we don't like about life won't be an issue when Jesus returns.

4. With that said, let me give a few more details before I get into the chapter itself. We'll get into the question of who is the "you", being described in much of this chapter. Some will argue it refers to Israelites living in that day. I'm arguing it refers to believers in Jesus who'll live forever and work for Him. The text refers to these "you" as priests. Let's remember what a priest is, someone who's helping others draw close to God. When Jesus returns to rule over the earth, we'll still serve Him as we help those who survive through the "great tribulation" draw close to Him. Does that mean we have to work when we're saved? Can't we kick back on that cloud and watch TV for eternity? In order to have eternal joy, God wants us to make a difference in the world. That idea of making a difference for Him continues in the next life. To put it simply, "Heaven won't be boring as Jesus is going to put us to work to make a difference for Him and continue to give us a joyful life!"
- a) Then we get reminders of what God likes and hates. It's about His justice ruling over the world. Part of our role as priests is to enforce that justice. We don't just tell people, "You should live this way or do that thing because God says so!" We enforce His way of living as to bring joy to those we are "priests" over. The eternal rewards for living in that world include never having to worry about "things" as they are provided for us.
  - b) So is that it? Work hard for Jesus now and we'll work hard for Him forever? First, it's not like that. If we live forever, then God must provide for us new bodies that don't wear out. I don't suspect we get tired after a hard day's work. The way to think of this concept is the greatest joy we get in this life is when we use it to make a difference for others. That same joy will occur forever when we will use our lives to continue to make a difference for Him in eternity. Therefore God wants us to be full of joy "then and now". That's the lesson we are getting into in this text.
  - c) Therefore as we read about this eternal life, God doesn't want us to think, "OK, when I get to heaven, then I'll start using my life to make a difference for others." He desires we start being a good witness for Him now in order to develop the lifestyle of being His witnesses to the world around us. The joy that comes from using our gifts for His benefit, we'll also get to have joy through eternity. To put it simply, God wants us to have joy now and for all of eternity. That joy comes from using our lives to make a difference in the world.
  - d) Finally, let me say a few words to those who are suffering at some moment and can't be a big help to others. One of the hardest things for Christians to learn is to let others help us in our time of need. It's relatively easy to want to help others. A hard thing to learn is to let others help us. Part of the joy of being a good witness for God is our willingness to be helped in our own tough situations. The point is God wants us to have joy by working as a "team" to make a difference for Him. With that said, let's get started on the text.
5. Chapter 61, Verse 1: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.
- a) To begin let me quote Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19a, NIV).
  - b) My simple point is Jesus quoted these verses directly. There are a few differences as we're reading Jesus quote from the Greek translation of Isaiah. By the time the translations goes from Hebrew to Greek to English in Luke as opposed to Hebrew directly to English as it is in the Old Testament, there are a few word differences.
  - c) OK time for the big "so what" question? So Jesus reads from this passage in Isaiah. Why is that significant? For starters, Jesus claims to be the "me" of this passage. He is saying He's the one who was called to bring good news to the poor (of spirit). He's sent to those of us who are brokenhearted (because we can never be good enough based on our efforts), and to set us free from an eternal separation from God due to our sins.

- d) Let me back up and discuss this in context of the last chapter or so. Isaiah was telling us in the previous chapter how it's worth the trouble to consider Jesus to be our Lord as well as the one who paid the complete price for our sins. That concept continues here in these two chapters with examples coming up. Before we get into that, Isaiah is stating that God had called him to preach this good news, which is what Verse 1 is all about.
    - i) To state all of this another way, Isaiah realized he is the "partial" fulfillment of this promise that God will reward us. He's the fulfillment in that God called Isaiah just to give us this message. Jesus is the real fulfillment of this text in that He's the one that Isaiah was talking about.
    - ii) One has to remember that when Jesus read from that scroll, there were no commas or periods in the original text. Those were added by bible scholars based on where they believed the breaks were. Jesus began his public ministry by reading this text in the synagogue He grew up in. I don't know if that was the assigned reading He was asked to read or He just picked it, as He knew it applied to Him. The point is Jesus didn't read it as if Isaiah was talking about someone else. Jesus read it, as He knew He was the fulfillment of this passage.
  - e) OK, enough background. What does the passage mean? That Jesus was called to preach to us the good news that our trust in Him means we don't have to try to earn God's love by our efforts. Because we're free from that requirement, we're now free to use our lives to make a difference for Him. We are the "prisoners" mentioned in this text. We are the "brokenhearted" in that we realize our efforts to please God are never good enough for a God who is perfect by definition. Finally, to "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" is the year Jesus actually paid the price for our sins, which is past tense to us and future tense to Isaiah. From God's all knowing perspective, it was a "done deal" from time immortal. In our "stuck in time" way of living, it's a specific date in time that's the key event of human history. Isaiah's point and Jesus point is that Jesus is the fulfillment of this text.
  - f) John, you're preaching to the choir again. We know we don't have to earn His love, and we know that we are "released prisoners" that a life of sin can lead us down. Since this is old news to us, why should we care about this passage? The answer is we need to see it in context of our lives. Because Jesus did this, we are free to receive the prizes we get for our trust in Him as we'll see through the rest of the text of this lesson.
  - g) Before we can know how we benefit from our trust in Jesus, first we have to realize He is the one who paid for our sins to begin with. That's why this "foundation" is given at the start of this section.
  - h) With that said, let's discuss the all-important "comma" to end this section. In other words, why did Jesus pause where He paused? Yes the rest of Verse 2 is also something Jesus is going to do, but the Luke passage describes what Jesus did at that moment in time about 2,000 years ago. The Isaiah text after the comma is what Jesus is going to do one day in the future. Speaking of that text, let's get to it.
6. Verse 2 (cont.): and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,<sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.
- a) First a little more about the "comma" in the middle of Verse 2. Realize there are a number of places in the Old Testament where a prophet of God will discuss some aspect of Jesus' First Coming and Second Coming in the same passage. Of course religious Jewish people will argue that someone else is the Messiah because when He comes, only then will He be bringing relief to His people and take vengeance upon others. My response is Chapter 53 as it talked of the Messiah suffering for our sins and being resurrected for proof that He is the one that paid the price for our sins. To quote one of my favorite bible teachers, I'm far more convinced that Jesus is God than I am of my own last name! That's my view too!

- b) With that speech out of my system, let's look at the text itself. Isaiah tells us that this day will also be a day of vengeance. OK John, without going all "Revelation" on us, what does that mean? It means that because our world is cursed by sin, Jesus will literally come back here one day to "right the wrongs" by forcing nonbelievers to live as He intends us to live. Remember that since God created this world and He has every right to do with it what He desires. A reason God's waiting thousand of years to come rule over our world is to show us how incapable we are of pleasing Him just by our own efforts. Yes we Christians know this, but most people don't. Therefore there has to be a day one day when God says, "OK, enough already of all of you living as you want, it's time for Me to show You how I intend for all of you to live!" which is when this eternal kingdom will eventually occur.
- c) Believe it or not that "end time" speech leads us to the next few phrases in the text. When the verses say, "comfort those who mourn...in Zion", think of it as describing those of us who desire the Messiah to come rule over this world so there will no longer be a world of injustice and sin everywhere. My point is when this utopia begins of God literally coming to rule over this world, our seemingly endless era of having sin be a key part of life will be coming to an end when all of this begins.
- d) It may help to explain all of this another way: Suppose if we had a desire to hurt someone an angel stepped in and stopped us. If we wanted to steal something, an angel prevented us from that bad act. If we wanted to drive a car while drunk, an angel took away our car keys. My point is we'd be complaining how God never gives us an opportunity to prove to Him we can make it without Him. By giving us free will, we realize our need to desire to have God rule over our lives to begin with. That's why God's waiting so long before He begins this "utopia". At the same time, He can't wait forever as there must be a day when all of this utopia will begin. The point for us is we can have hope that despite whatever it is we have to face in this lifetime, it will not go on forever that way. That's why we can be "comforted for mourning" about the way the world is.
- e) All of that does lead me back to these verses. Let me give another phrase from Verse 3 to illustrate my point. It also says, "to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes".
- i) When we think of "ashes" we think of death. It's describing something living as it is burnt to a crisp. Part of our eternal reward is we get a "crown of beauty" instead of just rotting in the ground until our bodies are no more. It's a colorful way to say that we will live forever based on our trust in Jesus as the Messiah.
  - ii) The next part of the verse says we will be a "garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair". Translation: We can praise God for this utopia instead of being in a state of despair over the way the world is. Instead of saying, "Oh, woe is me, my life's a big waste of time", we can have hope over our future.
  - iii) When Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, the main point of the book is what a waste of a life ours can be is if we don't live it for God. It's a similar point to here in Isaiah as we are no longer in despair about our future as we realize just how we are eternally blessed based on our trust in God.
- f) Finally notice the phrase, "oaks of righteousness". No we're not going to be a physical tree in heaven. It's just another colorful way of saying just as an oak tree begins as a little seed to become a great tree, so our lives will have purpose if we use them to make a difference for Jesus. God's purpose for creating us is to have someone to express His love upon. He wants from us our freewill choice to love Him back. We do that by putting other's needs as a priority over our own. That way we're showing His love to others around us. All I'm saying is we are like a mighty tree as we grow in our trust in God as we are then used as a witness for Him in the world around us. That's how we're to live out our lives.
- i) The final phrase is "a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor". We are created to glorify Him, which is what Isaiah's saying in a colorful way!

7. Verse 4: They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.
- a) I'm guessing you never thought we'd make it to Verse 4! So how did we transition from the fact that God "planted us" to make a difference for Him, to the "rebuilding the ancient ruins" text of Verse 4? Great question.
  - b) Let's start with what was ruined? Yes in one context it is describing the City of Jerusalem, as the Babylonians destroyed it and centuries later the Romans destroyed it. When Israel was born again as a country in 1948, the Israelites literally had to buy back the land piece by piece in the 1800's and early 1900's. They took what was ruined land and swamplands and converted it into usable land again. If you ever get a chance to see the nation of Israel what one realizes is how abandoned that land was before the Israelites took it over. It was pretty much ignored for almost two thousand years at least for most of that land.
    - i) My point is Isaiah's vision of the land of Israel being restored came true a bunch of times in history. It was partially restored after the Babylonian destruction of that land. It was partially restored after the Romans destruction. This verse came true in 1948 when it was fully restored.
  - c) That leads to the tough question: If the Israelites are back in that land after thousands of years without it being their homeland, why hasn't Jesus returned yet to set up this utopia as I call it? Why hasn't it started yet? First we have to remember that God works only on His timing, not on ours. The best answer we can give is He's waiting for more people to accept Jesus as God before He "pulls the trigger". The best way to consider all of this is to realize that heaven will have a fixed number of people there. Therefore somebody has to be the last person saved. That's what we're waiting for, before all this begins. Does all of this mean that since Israel's a country again, will this happen soon? Again, none of us can predict God's timing. My answer is it appears so but again, He only works on His timing!
  - d) Instead of focusing on what we don't know, realize Verse 4 focuses on what we do know: The land of Israel has been restored as promised millenniums ago by Isaiah.
8. Verse 5: Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.
- a) First the word "aliens" does not refer to "outer space aliens". It refers to non-Jewish people who will work the Israelite fields. So what does that mean? It means that when all of this utopia begins, we won't be doing the daily chores of working the land. So does that mean we do get to kick back in heaven all day watching television or something like that? No it does not. It means we rule with Jesus and we rule over those who survive through all the "bad stuff of Revelation" and some of those survivor's will be assigned to do the work that is required in order to grow food.
  - b) Realize what this verse implies: That food will be necessary in that day. It also means that grapes will exist in that day and that means wine. So will our eternal bodies require food to survive? Don't know. I do know that this eternity begins with a great meal, so I'm sure we can eat food. What I don't know is how we digest it. That's a wait and see question.
  - c) So in heaven if non-Jewish people are working the fields, what does that mean for us? It's a reminder that we rule and reign with Jesus over this world. The job of the saved will be to enforce His rule over the world. Israelites who survive through the "Revelation" days, will get to enjoy the produce of the land of Israel with non-Jewish people doing the work of preparing the food. OK then, what will the Israelites who survive that period do since aliens are working the land? I'd argue that many will come to trust in Jesus as their Lord and since they will accept His free gift of salvation, they'll be a part of our "ruling class" of that future day. In short, it'll be a happy ending for all who trust in Jesus.
9. Verse 6: And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.
- a) So you want more proof of what we'll be doing when this utopia begins? Verse 6 tells us. We won't be working the land as we'll be busy being priests for God. Let me explain:

- b) I can just hear a lot of you saying, "I don't want to be a priest. I'd rather be a farmer or just kick back in heaven on a couch watching television!" Why do we have to work at all when we get to heaven? Further, why do we have to be priests? Do we have to wear the outfits that we associate with priests? First, we have to stop thinking of being "priests" as a duty, but as a privilege. When we help others draw closer to God, whether we realize it or not, we are acting as a priest. When we teach something from God's word, we are a priest as He desire we be. All I'm saying is the functions of the priests in that future day is not a lot different than how we're to act now as Christians. The point is God desires we use our life to make a difference for Him. That desire will continue for eternity. Therefore, we should think of being a "priest" for eternity as a blessing, not a duty.
  - c) Let me explain this one more way: Do you want a joy filled life? There's nothing that will bring us more joy in this life than to use it to make a difference for others. For us to have a life full of joy for eternity, means we use our eternal life to bring joy to others. That's why we will be using our lives to be "priests".
  - d) By the way, this idea is communicated in the New Testament as well. Revelation says that we will be a "kingdom of priests" as we serve Jesus. That's the idea of Revelation 1:6. All I an saying is one of the great rewards for betting on Jesus is that we'll get to rule with Him and be "priests" for Him as we help lead others closer to Him. I've come to realize that we better get used to being helpful to others, because that will be your destiny for a long time to come. While you're contemplating your eternal destiny, I'll sneak over to Verse 7:
10. Verse 7: Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.
- a) Speaking of a joy-filled future, I present Verse 7. Consider that those of us who do use our lives to make a difference for Jesus are rarely high on society's totem poll. There is a line I like that says, "The significant are rarely famous and the famous are rarely significant". It is from Dennis Prager. The idea is those people who really make a difference in the world are rarely famous and vice versa. Here in this verse Isaiah's speaking to those people who do use their lives for God's glory. Their reward is a "double portion" of their land and as I love to point out "everlasting joy".
  - b) Let me start with the "double portion" concept. There is an Old Testament law that states that when a parent divides up their estate to their children, the oldest gets twice as much as everyone else in exchange for "doing the dividing". This law wasn't explicitly stated by Moses, but it was implied. The most famous example is the common ancestor of all of the Israelites was named Jacob. One of his 12 sons was named Joseph. Jacob said Joseph's two sons now belong to Jacob. The idea is that when the land of Israel was divided into all 12 tribes, effectively that one son Joseph got a double portion, as each of his two sons did get a section of land equal to Jacob's other eleven children.
    - i) If you're confused just remember that one child gets twice as much for dividing up the family estate. I state all of this here as part of our reward for using our lives to make a difference for Jesus is we'll get that "double-portion" versus people who do believe Jesus is God but didn't do much to use their lives for His glory.
    - ii) Let me try this one more way: If we're going to be "priests" for Jesus for eternity, it also means we're going to be assigned a territory. We get a bigger piece of the pie, if we're willing to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus now than others who may be saved, but "waste their salvation" by pretty much ignoring Jesus.
    - iii) What all this means is it's worth the time and trouble to use our life to make some sort of difference for Jesus. We may receive shame in this life, but our reward for living that way is "double" of those effectively waste the time God has given them, but still believe Jesus died for all their sins. Realize the issue isn't the exact number of people we save, but our loyalty to whatever God called us to do in this life.

11. Verse 8: "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.
- a) Speaking of understanding God's standard for determining our eternal rewards, I present Verse 8. Are you confused about how to use one's life to make a difference for Jesus? I'd like to present this verse to you. My point is if you understand what God loves and what it is He hates, you can get an idea of how to use our lives for His glory.
  - b) If God loves the concept of justice and hates the idea of people not doing the right thing, it can be our "marching orders" as to how to use our lives. For example a policeman or even an attorney who wants to properly execute justice and do what's right is one example of a person who believes Jesus is God and wants justice. For most of us not in the professions related to law enforcement the idea comes back to the straightforward idea that one way of being a good witness for God is we do what's right in life and do our best to avoid any act of "inequity" and fight to stop it when we can. That can include the idea of serving in a military battle so that justice gets done or it can be as simple as teaching our children of what it is God loves and hates. My point is I want us to "think outside the box" of how it is we can use our lives to make a difference for Jesus and have rewards and joy for doing those things that God wants us to do.
  - c) As I love to state, if you're not sure how to use your life for Jesus, pray about the concept of making yourself available for God and asking Him how we can use our lives to glorify Him and you'll be surprised the paths He'll lead you down. As I learned many years ago God's not looking for ability, God's looking for availability!
12. Verse 9: Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed."
- a) Let me address for the moment the issue of fame. A page back I gave a quote by Dennis Prager that said, "The famous are rarely significant and the significant are rarely famous." The point is most of us will not gain any fame by using our lives to make a difference for Jesus, but part of our eternal rewards is whether we realize it or not, we will be famous in the days when Jesus rules. It's like those living at that time will say, "See that person who rules with Jesus over there? He or she used their lives to make a difference for Him. Now they get rewarded for all that work and people will realize God has blessed them."
    - i) The point is it's worth the time and trouble to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus as the eternal rewards are far greater than whatever the "rich and famous" do get this lifetime.
    - ii) Remember that my opening question was "What's in it for us?" In this verse Isaiah is saying the Israelite descendants who live around the time of Jesus return will be blessed for being a part of it. I'd argue that the Christian who's used his or her life to make a difference for Jesus will be equally blessed or far greater so as Jesus will reward those who use their lives to make a difference for Him.
    - iii) Speaking of being in a joyful mood based on a wonderful future, look at Verse 10:
13. Verse 10: I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup> For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.
- a) If there is one thing I've learned about Isaiah after going through most of the book by now is the fact he's in his best mood when he focuses on the goodness of God. In these last two verses of Chapter 61, Isaiah breaks out in praise realizing that despite the hardships of the fact he was called to be a witness for God the joy of living to make a difference for Him far outweigh the difficulties of that lifestyle choice.
  - b) Of all things, Isaiah compares that joy to a wedding day. He describes a bride and groom as they get all dressed up for their wedding day. It's a way of expressing joy.

- c) For those of us who are married, most of us look back fondly at our wedding day as one of the greatest days of our lives. The point of this verse is that to have a relationship with God brings us as much joy as one has on one's wedding day.
  - d) Which leads to Verse 11. Isaiah uses a different analogy in this verse. The idea is just as a plant grows from "nothing" to be a full grown plant, so God raises us who committed our life to serving Him be "raised" to sing praises to God.
  - e) Let me put this another way: Why do I sing praises to God in church? Do I have to? No. Do I have a great singing voice? Not really. I sing out to God because I'm grateful for the opportunities He's given me to make a difference for Him and the chance to use my life to glorify Him. It's filled me with joy and like Isaiah I can't help but sing out in praises when I get my focus on the good things He's done for me as a witness for Him. Hopefully that's going to inspire you to do the same thing the next time you sing out to God.
  - f) With that said, Isaiah's "Praise Fest" continues into Chapter 62.
14. Chapter 62, Verse 1: For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.
- a) My very loose translation: I'm not just in a joyful mood and want to sing praises to God for my sake. I do this because God's going to bless His chosen people as well. I'm happy for my fellow Israelites as well as for myself. Did Isaiah think only Israelites (that's what Zion refers to), will only be blessed by the Messiah "setting up shop"? Of course not. It'll apply to anyone who puts their trust in the God of the Universe and realize that He alone paid the full price for our sins. We honor Him as our Lord (in charge of our lives) and we too, have joy now and will have joy for eternity as we use our lives for His glory.
  - b) Notice the "how long" factor here. Isaiah effectively says he'll keep on praising God until all of "this" takes place. The "this", is the Messiah's rule. To state the obvious, the Messiah didn't come in Isaiah's lifetime. He may not come in our lifetime. Still, I'm positive Jesus will "set up shop" (as I like to call it) one day. Isaiah's been spot-on with many predictions that have come true in this book. If I can trust Isaiah with those predictions I'll also trust Him with his future predictions about Jesus' return. Like I said earlier in the lesson, I am more confident that Jesus is God than I am of what is my last name!
  - c) Remember that "hope and faith" are in things we can't see. Isaiah didn't physically see the return of Jesus but He had hope and faith in that event occurring. Just as Isaiah's positive it will occur one day so we should live with that same hope and faith as the reality of this event occurring will bring us far more joy than anything we can do in this lifetime.
  - d) Speaking of joy, let's move on.
15. Verse 2: The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
- a) Speaking of how the return of Jesus will affect the world, I present Verse 2. Here we read of the nations (think anyone non-Jewish) seeing this event occurring one day and even all the leaders of the world will see this event. It's funny to consider that in Isaiah's day we'd have to wonder how the whole world can see that event? In our modern era where events are communicated world wide and we can instantly watch on our phones of something in the other side of the world, we can understand why God waited until all that technology's available before His return.
  - b) The key point of the first part of the verse is the fact that non-Jewish people will be forced to acknowledge Jesus as God. Some will accept it and most will be forced to accept it. The point is it will occur and people around the world will be aware this will occur.
  - c) Of all things, I need to change topics to explain the second part of this verse. If one reads the book of Genesis, one notices that God likes to rename people after some major events in their lives. For example, Abraham's original name was "Abram". God renamed him to indicate how he'll be the father of many names. Jacob was renamed "Israel" to indicate the fact we struggle with God. Even in the Gospels, Peter's original name was Simon.



- i) OK, so God renamed a few people. What's that have to do with you and me? For those of you (like me) who were confirmed Roman Catholic as a child, part of that ritual is to pick a new name to remind ourselves that God will rename us one day. I just had this conversation with my mom last week. She remembered her "new name", but I couldn't recall mine. I'll wait to see what God picks for me one day.
  - ii) Which leads to the more important question, why a new name for us? It's so we'll know how "God sees us" as being blessed. Whenever someone in the bible gets a new name, it's to symbolize something about their relationship with Him. All that I'm saying is God will rename us and the meaning of that unknown name, will be an indication of our eternal relationship with God.
  - iii) Bottom line is this will be a good thing. We have no idea what our new name will be, but it will be an eternal blessing to us.
  - iv) Speaking of joy, let's get back to Isaiah's speech.
16. Verse 3: You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup> No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.
- a) To understand these verses, we have to start with the question of who's the "You" to start these two verses. It's best to see this as being "Jewish". The point is the Israelites who live in that land at the time of Jesus return will be blessed by that event.
  - b) That lead to the great question, will most Israelites accept Jesus at that time? I'd argue yes for a number of reasons. For starters I'll argue the "rapture" of the church occurs prior to this event. Most Israelites will figure out they "blew it" and beg for Jesus to help them. I'd also argue that when all the bad stuff of Revelation occurs and Israel is threatened so that it may not exist much longer they'll be desperate for help and collectively pray for Jesus to return to help them.
  - c) I'd like to explain these verses another way: I've struggled with the idea of being married to Jesus. It's hard as a male to be thought of as the female bride of Jesus. That's how the church is described in the book of Revelation (See 21:2 as an example.). No, I don't think my "body parts" will change to be female. It's a word picture to indicate how a husband is supposed to show love to his bride, so God cares that much about us. I state all that here as we read in this verse that the land of Israel will not be "desolate" in the day Jesus rules over that land. The people there who trust in Jesus will be blessed as God takes delight in them and us as "His bride".
  - d) Let me try this one more way and then I'll move on: One thing I figured out as a Christian is that God's into "relationships". He wants to develop relationships with believers, as He wants to draw us closer and closer to Him over time. That closeness won't end when our life ends here. It continues further into the next life. Just as the land of Israel gets blessed by Jesus return so we get blessed when all of this occurs. That's the point here.
  - e) Speaking of comparing our relationship with God to a wonderful marriage notice Verse 5.
17. Verse 5: As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.
- a) The strangest phrase in this verse is where it says, "so will your sons marry you". My first topic of Verse 4 is the question of who is the "you" of that verse? The answer is the land of Israel. The point is Israelites who'll be in that land at the time of Jesus' return will benefit from that event. Again, we're back to the idea of "being married to Jesus", not in the sense of physical sex to produce children, but in the closeness that nothing comes between those who have a healthy marriage relationship.
  - b) The comparison to a wedding continues: Just as a bridegroom is filled with joy over what he is about to start, so God is full of joy over the eternal relationship He gets to enjoy with all of us who give our lives to Him.

- c) The concept of God being "joyful" requires an explanation. As I love to state, I argue that God is perfect by definition. He doesn't need anything. Yet Verse 5 says God is joyful at this event occurring. The illustration I like to use is about something we enjoy doing to a point where we don't care about money. For example, if someone loves to paint or play a musical instrument, they often will do it just for the joy of it. That's why I love to write all of these lessons. It brings me endless joy. God gets joy by having relationships with all of us. Do I fully understand how a perfect God desires this? Of course not. I just get the idea that God out of His free will, wants to express the joy of a wonderful relationship on people who freely choose to be a part of that relationship with Him.
  - d) To put this simply, I don't know why God choose me, but He did. I freely choose to show love back to Him because I desire to do so, and that's that. Yes we have to come to Him on His terms, which is to accept His payment for our sins, and be willing to trust Him to take over our lives and use them for His glory. If one gets that, one gets the Christian life.
  - e) That little speech leads us back to my lesson theme. Yes we are blessed by being saved so we can spend eternity with God. The reward is we'll get to draw close to Him like a bride draws close to a husband in a healthy marriage relationship. That's what Isaiah's trying to tell us in this verse.
18. Verse 6: I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, <sup>7</sup> and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.
- a) Stop and think about Jerusalem's history since the time Isaiah wrote this. That city went through a number of major wars and was destroyed several times. The Babylonians did destroy it as well as the Romans centuries later. The crusades also damaged it. That city was controlled by Muslims for centuries. Yet despite all of that negative history, Isaiah's telling us that God has put a "watchman on the wall", to say that one day Jerusalem will be established as a place for praise for the whole earth to praise God.
  - b) When I visited the old city of Jerusalem, a couple of things stood out to me. The first was just how friendly the religious Jewish people were who lived there. They realized that it's God's desire for that city to be a place of prayer for all nations. (Isaiah 56:7 & Mark 11:17.) Also there were no airplanes overhead as Israel made it a "no fly zone" to protect that city as a place that is sacred. So does that mean these verses have been fulfilled today? I'd say both yes and no. It is in that Israel controls it. It's still in danger. There are still countries that want Israel destroyed as a nation as many don't accept the idea of a Jewish God to be the ruler over them. However, it is God's intent to make Jerusalem the center of the world and it will occur one day.
  - c) Consider Jerusalem another way: It has no natural resources and there is nothing special about it in terms of things people would desire. There is no harbor, no minerals, no great source of income all to itself. Yet it seems like the world is obsessed over it. A classic joke at the United Nations goes, "Can we talk about something else other than Jerusalem as it seems like that's all that gets discussed around here."
  - d) OK, "bottom line" time again. God's never going to be "happy" until the day comes when Jerusalem will be the center of the world with His Messiah (Jesus) ruling over it. Again I don't think of God as having "moods". He's always angry at sin. He's always joyful over those of us who accept Him as being God. The point is God's waiting for a specific fixed number of people to be believers before all of this begins. Why a specific number? There will be a specific number of people saved, not an infinite number. Therefore there has to be a last person saved before God says to Jesus "Let's get started on this project!"
  - e) The point is all of this will happen one day. The reason 30% of the bible is predictions is so we can trust the bible with the greatest prediction of all, that Jesus will return to come rule over the world from Jerusalem. To state what should be obvious by now, I'm sure it is a literal event and will occur one day in the world's future.

19. Verse 8: The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled;<sup>9</sup> but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary."
- a) Remember why we're getting into all of this. So we'll have a good idea what it is we will get to do once our eternal life begins. Speaking of clues as to that event, let me discuss a little the text here of verses 8-9:
  - b) Stop and consider how much God's people have suffered since Isaiah wrote this. We can discuss the Babylonian and Roman destruction. We can discuss the Crusades or even the Muslim efforts over the millenniums to wipe out the Jewish nation. Then we had the big Holocaust during World War II. Part of the ritual of a traditional Jewish Sabbath includes the prayer that effectively states that every generation of Israelites must face the danger of some group or person trying to destroy that nation. My point is history has born out that idea that the Israelites have been the target of destruction all through history.
  - c) I state all that dark history to tie it to these verses. Here God promises that never again is Israel going to have to suffer by being slaves to another nation. That they will benefit from their own labor and they'll no longer have to fear any enemies. The idea is all of the tragic history of how the Jewish nation has suffered will not go on forever. A reason that prayer as part of the Jewish Sabbath ritual is there is to remind them of "just that", how they have to and had to suffer won't go on forever. God will bring it to an end one day.
  - d) OK good for the Israelites I suppose. What does that have to do with you and me and our eternal rewards? Glad you asked. While we as Christians haven't collectively had to deal with what that nation did, there have been millions of Christians who have been martyred for their faith. Many more have had to turn away from "just having a nice life" so as to use their lives to making a difference for Jesus. The point is it's all worth it. It's worth all of the suffering of this lifetime as the eternal life and rewards far outweigh this one.
20. Verse 10: Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations.
- a) Remember that we're discussing our eternal future with Jerusalem being the center of that future. It's discussing what life in Jerusalem will be like for those Israelites there when all of this begins. I've been arguing this whole lesson that we Christians will be a part of that scene as we work for Jesus as His "priests" to teach others about Him and enforce His rule over the world. Here in Verse 10, Isaiah sees the Messiah leading the process to enter that city and to "clear the way" for the Messiah to come rule there.
  - b) I have to admit, as I read this verse, I think of John the Baptist. He lived out in the desert, and his ministry was to tell people to prepare for Jesus' coming. I see that because here in these verses, we get Isaiah telling people to "prepare". Remember that Isaiah lived around seven centuries prior to Jesus first coming. The attitude of Isaiah is effectively the same as John the Baptist's: The Messiah will one day rule over this world, so prepare for it. For us as well as them, it means get used the idea of Jesus ruling over the world, so start living as if it already happened by using our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - c) God wants us to live our lives as if He can return at any moment. The way we prepare for the Messiah's return is to use our lives to make a difference for Him. That's how we can be full of joy now by using our lives to make a difference for others. That's how we'll have a sense of joy for eternity as we use our lives for Him when He returns. All I'm saying is we might as well get used to living for Jesus now, as that's how we'll live eternally.
  - d) Believe it or not, that little speech leads me back to Verse 10. It's describing the future day of Jesus entering that city. This verse is more than a "building project" to clear the way of a great dignitary coming through, it's the idea of getting our hearts right and using some of the time that God's given us to make a difference for Him. Again, if we're going to live that way eternally, we might as well get used to living that way now!

- e) But won't this verse also be literal when Jesus returns? Of course. Will Jerusalem be torn down again and rebuilt when Jesus returns? Don't know. All I know is it's standing now, and God desires we use our lives to prepare for His return. As to any physical project that will be required to rebuild the city of Jerusalem when He returns, we'll just watch and see if and when it happens and how that happens. In the meantime, two more verses to go.
21. Verse 11: The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'" <sup>12</sup> They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.
- a) These last two verses here show us that this is not just a "Jewish thing". This proclamation of Jesus literally ruling over the world is made to the "ends of the earth". Since we live in a world with technology to see live events all over the world anytime we want, I'd argue we now live in a world where Verse 11 can literally happen much easier than in Isaiah's day.
- b) All I'm saying is Jesus ruling from Jerusalem won't just be a major change to politics in the Middle East. It will affect the whole world, including the religious and the nonreligious.
- c) All people all over the world, who survive through the tough "Revelation stuff", will have to acknowledge Jesus as the ruler of the world. Even the Israelites who for the most part, do not accept Jesus as the Messiah will be saying in that day, "See your Savior comes".
- d) We also get a direct reference to rewards in Verse 11. Again, our rewards for serving God is not a big house where we kick back for eternity and watch television. We are rewarded by Jesus with opportunities to make a difference for Him in the next life.
- e) To put this another way, Jesus wants us to have joy forever. We have joy in this life when we use our lives to make a difference for Him in the world around us. We will have joy in the next life as He rewards our service with more service so we can experience more joy.
- f) Suppose you are thinking, I don't want to work forever. I want to "kick back on my couch in heaven and do nothing significant forever". Ask yourself, won't that be a boring way to live? If we have new physical bodies that don't wear out, why will we need rest? All that I'm saying is we'll need something to do for eternity, and Jesus "puts us to work" by doing what brings us joy and using our eternal lives to glorify Him. Therefore, we might as well get used to the idea of making a difference for Him now, as that what's we will do in that next life as well. Bottom line: Get used to using our lives to make a difference for Jesus. It will not only bring us joy in this life, but that sense of joy will continue forever.
- g) All of that leads us back to these verses. Jerusalem will be the "center" of this all. That city with no natural resources and nothing desirable about it, is the place God chose to be His eternal home on earth. Yes God by definition is perfect and doesn't need a physical place to "hang His hat". However, God as fully human, will need a place to call home and be a place where He'll rule the world from. That's another reason why I accept the idea of our eternal bodies existing in more than three dimensions. That's how we can get close to Him anytime we want and still go be of service to Him in the future.
22. As I wrap this up, I admit this is a strange lesson as we contemplate what it is we do all day after we're saved. The text describes what eternity will be like. I'm sorry if I burst a few bubbles over what it is we'll do in heaven all day! I mainly want us to realize that the life we live now is meant as a "training ground" for eternity. God doesn't want us to be miserable. Of course we all have to deal with issues that won't go away just because we believe in Jesus. The idea is our trust in Him gives us the perspective to have the joy that God wants us to have as we go through life. I'd also like you to realize God's training us for a "reason" to prepare us for the joy of the eternal next life!
23. On that strange but positive thought, let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, often we get so busy dealing with this life, we tend to forget that You have eternal plans for us that will bring us a life full of joy for eternity. Help us to prepare for that eternity by using our lives to make a difference for You here and now. Make it obvious to us how we can use our lives for Your glory and guide us to make that difference for Your Kingdom. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.