

**Isaiah 62:1-7** <sup>ESV</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. <sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. <sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup> You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. <sup>5</sup> For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. <sup>6</sup> On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, <sup>7</sup> and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

## “Persistent Prayer”

This passage from Isaiah was written to a small group of Israelites, a righteous remnant, who just had returned from exile in Babylon. They were small in number, about 6,000, and they returned for reasons of faith. Extra-biblical history tells us that life most likely would have been better for them in Babylon. In fact, in Jesus day and right on up to the Middle Ages, the largest concentration of Jews in the world was in Babylon. Things must have been good there. Seventy odd years prior the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and they took the Jews back to Babylon into exile particularly the wealthy and influential and the priests and scribes. Yet, they didn't go to Babylon to be slaves. It was a resettlement and for the most part, they did remarkably well. So, when the prophet who scholars call Second Isaiah, who wrote chapters 40-55 of Isaiah, comforted them with the proclamation that they were now going to return to the Promised Land, the majority apparently saw no need for it. Why go back there and go through the hard work of starting over? These would have been the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who were first brought to Babylon. They saw no need for a temple. They were happy enough to carrying on the traditions and festivals at their synagogues and in their homes.

But, the Temple had its purpose. It was where the LORD could be presently found. Therefore, the remnant that came back to Jerusalem, came back for reason of wanting to live where their God was at and where he promised to bless them with himself. I imagine them as being a bit deluded with infantile magical imaginations expecting things to go perfectly “according to prophesy”. Don't get me wrong; things were going according to prophesy. Yet, they just hadn't learned that to God a thousand years are like a day. Faith and faithfulness are learned over time in the mundane nitty gritty of day to day life. Life, faith, and a life lived faithfully is not like instant oatmeal. You don't just add water and nuke it. The disillusionment this first group of returnees must have felt when they first laid eyes on Jerusalem I think would have been quite intense. Jerusalem still lay in shambles. It looked desolate and forsaken. This remnant was no more than 6,000 in number. They had left behind a comfortable life and had just spent months caravanning across deserts and rugged terrain. Honestly, how were they going to rebuild this desolate God-forsaken heap of rubble? How were they going to eat and build homes and make a new life for themselves on land that had returned to be over-grown and wild? Were the prophets wrong? Had they been bamboozled with false hopes?

It is to this small, dispirited, over-whelmed remnant of folks with righteous intentions that the prophet proclaims: “I will not be silent nor will I rest until your righteousness shines like the dawn and your salvation burns like a torch. The nations and their kings are going to see your righteousness and your glory. You're going to be a beautiful crown, a royal diadem in the hand of the LORD God of all creation. The LORD is giving you a new name. Your name is not Azubah (Forsaken). Your land is not called Shemamah (Desolate). Your name is Hephzibah (My Delight Is in Her). Your land is Beulah land (Married). The LORD God delights in you and he will provide for you as a husband who very much loves his beautiful wife.” The prophet also goes on to say, “I have put prayer sentinels on your walls and they will not let God rest until he establishes you and makes you the praise of all the earth.” The prophet also talked of sons and daughters coming from the north, south, east, and west and, remarkably their number grew to roughly 40,000. In time they had enough people to get the job done, but it would take time.

The prophets message to this remnant is brief and to the point. Their return, their Evel-Kneivel-motorcycle-jump-over-the-Snake-River-canyon leap of faith was an act of righteousness and their LORD God delights in them greatly. The word for delight is actually he is rejoicing, worshipfully overjoyed with them. The LORD's jumping with joy because this people, his people, in the face of the comforts of Babylon got it right. They obeyed the voice of the prophets and went forth in faith and faithfulness with the LORD's purpose for them in mind rather than shoring themselves up with comfort in Babylon. This remnant left all that behind to come to Jerusalem for the sake of being with the LORD in the land where he promised to bless them with himself. The LORD was rejoicing over them in their faithfulness and he would continue working with and in them to establish them so that they would become the praise of all the nations. Their part was to pray and to work along with God until it all happened.

Well, I could end this sermon here by saying “Do the LORD's will. Pray and work for him and he will establish you above all others. If you're a Christian and you obey the LORD, he's going to bless you. No matter what the pit is that you may be wallowing around in or the muddy cistern the selfishness of others have left you in; go with God, always leap with faith and he'll bless you.” I could end the sermon there, but, you tell me, is “Go with God and he'll bless you” truly what faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, is all about? I would hope that after almost seven years of my huffin' an' spittin' up

here you would be left feeling quite unsettled with that kind of a "Pat" answer. You should be saying, "Now wait a minute, that's the sort of thing Pat Robertson says when he's not saying things like the Haitians are getting what they deserve for making a pact with the devil to get the French out." I hope you all realize that's a load of manure. But anyway, let's push this passage a little deeper.

Chapters 60-62 of the Book of Isaiah form the core of the message of what scholars call Third Isaiah, chapters 56-66. Third Isaiah prophesied this hope to the returned remnant but, history has shown that his prophecies were not fulfilled in them. After just a couple of generations the faith and faithfulness of the remnant waned and with the exception of a small group of them, the great-grandchildren of the remnant that returned became as wicked as those who went into exile in the first place. Foreign invaders returned and the Jewish people became exiles in their own land until the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 and scattered the Jewish people abroad not to return until 1948.

When Jesus came he proclaimed himself and his kingdom to be the fulfillment of Third Isaiah's prophecies. When Jesus went to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth they ran him out of town after he quoted Third Isaiah saying, "The Spirit of the LORD God is upon 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, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor" (Isaiah 61:1-2). He then told them, "Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus, God the Son incarnate, our Ascended Lord is the one who calls himself "I" in our passage this morning and we are those to whom he speaks. He is the one who will not be quiet until our righteousness shines like the dawn or be quiet until our salvation burns like a torch. If you catch the metaphor there, God is making us to be the light of the world. Jesus' faithfulness unto death has restored us to righteousness and brought salvation to us. Now, through his persistent praying on our behalf to the Father and the Father sending the Holy Spirit into us in answer to that prayer to establish us as his people, the Trinity is making the people of Jesus to be light to the world, a people whom all peoples will speak well of. Moreover, Jesus has placed people within his churches who constantly watch for the Lord to move and who fervently remind the Father to fulfill his purpose for us, his people whom he delights over. We might be a small congregation that struggles, but our name is not Desolate or Forsaken. Our name is His Delight Is in Her and Married. The Lord's affection for us is that of a bridegroom for his beautiful bride. What I have said here for us as a congregation is true especially for us each as individuals. Jesus is praying for you and he has appointed people whom you probably know nothing about who persistently pray that the Lord's will be done for you here on earth as in heaven. Friends, the Triune God of Grace has a purpose for us and he is making us to be a light to the world. Don't fret that we are small, build the city by joining with Jesus in his persistent praying and be the temple. Shine because the Lord is in your midst. Amen.