

A Justice-Loving God

As Dwayne boarded the flight to Amsterdam, he looked at the other people getting on the same plane. The flights he had made to numerous destinations around the world now easily numbered in the hundreds. Yet each one was different; the people were always different. He had sat next to men and women of different nationalities and languages, of different cultures and religions. He thought about how flying became his ministry—an opportunity to share how his faith in Christ changed his life. He wondered how many people were led to the Lord by Christians like himself—all while cruising at an altitude of some six miles above the earth—and how a conversation could result in spiritual transformation.

He led a few people to Christ himself on the longer cross-country and overseas flights. Many more he helped initiate their consideration of following Jesus—he had “sown the seeds” of the Gospel. *How many of those people ultimately put their faith in Christ? he wondered. How many turned their lives around and then were instrumental in pointing others to Jesus?* Then it hit him: All across the world are believers connected to each other solely by their love of and praise for the Lord.

As Dwayne placed a bag in the overhead compartment, he glanced at the young man in the window seat—a young man he’d be sitting by for the 12-hour flight. He quickly prayed and then introduced himself.

1. Why is our relationship to each other in Christ far more important than what country we belong to, or what ethnic group we are a part of, or what any other thing that distinguishes us from others?

2. Why is praising the Lord in every language both uplifting and beautiful?

3. Why does God’s righteousness appeal to people of all cultures?

LESSON FOCUS: God’s righteousness and praise will spring forth in all nations.

The Promised Renewal of God's People

Isaiah 61:8-11, KJV

8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:8-11, NIV

⁸"For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people

and make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their 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."

¹⁰I 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 his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For 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.

Isaiah 61 begins describing the work of the Servant, the Messiah. The Spirit would enable the Servant to be prudent and effective in His God-given ministry. Verses 4-7 concern a time

yet to come when the redeemed will be restored to the promised land and reestablish their destroyed cities.

Verse 8 describes God's attitude toward virtue and vice. On one level, the reference here is to wicked acts the surrounding nations performed against the chosen people. Yet, on another level, the Lord likely also had in mind transgressions the people of Judah committed against one another (see 1:23; 5:7).

The emphatic Hebrew phrase rendered "I, the LORD" (61:8) signals just how much He took delight in all forms of "justice." Several manuscripts read "robbery with a burnt offering," which corresponds to the KJV translation. The NIV reflects another textual reading, namely, "robbery and wrongdoing."

Both options highlight God's hate for injustice, regardless of whether the perpetrators were pagan Gentiles or God's people. Because of His righteous character, He would judge those who mistreated their fellow human beings. As well, the oppressed among His people could depend on Him to recompense them for the suffering they endured at the hands of the wicked elite.

Furthermore, because of the Lord's "faithfulness" to His promises, He would bestow on the righteous remnant earthly and eternal blessings. This especially included His "everlasting covenant" (vs. 9) with the redeemed, which the Savior would ratify through the shedding of His blood at Calvary. The Lord's eternal agreement with the upright guaranteed that their "descendants" would be recognized and honored among the "nations" of the world. Put differently, all earth's inhabitants would affirm that the "offspring" of the righteous were the recipients of God's special favor (the basic meaning of the Hebrew word rendered "blessed").

Isaiah 61:10 begins a dual emphasis on rejoicing exuberantly and exulting in one's relationship with God. The speaker here remains unidentified. Most likely, it is Zion personified as the redeemed, who are pictured as dressing themselves in "garments" representing their "salvation," along with being covered in a "robe" symbolizing their "righteousness." It is like a "bridegroom" donning the ornate headdress or turban of a priest and a "bride" wearing exquisite "jewels."

Verse 11 shifts to agricultural imagery by portraying the all-powerful Lord planting the seed of "righteousness" in a

“garden” and causing it to burst forth and begin growing. Faith in God would be the basis for His people being rescued from their plight (both temporally and eternally) and enjoying a right relationship with Him. The broader truth is that in God’s future kingdom, He will cause “righteousness” to flower and “praise” to blossom in the presence of all earth’s inhabitants.

4. What types of human behavior does the Lord love, and oppositely hate?

5. What was the basis for God blessing His people?

6. What would result from the enduring “covenant” (Isa. 61:9) God made with His people?

7. What is the nature of the response to God’s blessings?

The Promised Vindication of God’s People

Isaiah 62:2-4, KJV

2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.

3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

Isaiah 62:2-4, NIV

²The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³You will be a crown of splendor
in the LORD’s hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of
your God.

⁴No 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.

Isaiah 62 is comparable to a chorus, repeating the truth that God would return for His chosen people and restore them to their homeland. On one level, this described their release from Babylonian exile. But on another level, the complete redemption of the remnant awaited the Messiah's second advent.

Isaiah 62 depicts God speaking on behalf of Jerusalem, its inhabitants, and their "righteousness" (vs. 2, KJV). The legal aspects of justice are in view, especially the Lord's acquittal of Zion. The NIV describes it as the city's "vindication," which also includes the related concepts of deliverance and triumph because "the nations" (some of whom had exploited and exiled God's chosen people in the past) will witness Jerusalem's victory. Despite the threats from Zion's foes, God would ensure the holy city's victory blazed like the noon-day sun.

Familiar royal imagery is used in 62:3 to describe Jerusalem as a magnificent "crown" that the Lord held securely in His "hand." The image is that of an exquisitely jeweled headdress. The corresponding depiction is that of God placing Zion, as a splendid "diadem," in His palm. The picture is that the chosen people would enjoy worldwide renown. They would also be showered with the Creator's glory and blessings.

Previously, the Israelites' idolatrous ways ruptured their relationship with the Lord. This resulted in Zion being called "Deserted" and "Desolate" (vs. 4). But God had previously announced that, in the day of the holy city's vindication, her King would restore the previously-broken covenant (60:15).

Zion would even enjoy the great honor of the Lord designating it with a "new name" (62:2). Verse 4 says Zion would be renamed "Hephzibah" [hef-zuh-bah], while the land would be called "Beulah." The first term means "my delight is in her," while the second term can be translated "married."

The prophet announced that God's favor would rest once again on His chosen people. The city and its righteous people would be comparable to the precious jewels that cover the outer surface of a crown, especially as the people sparkled over their redeemed homeland.

8. What sort of future awaited God's chosen people?

9. What change of status awaited God's chosen people?

Radiant Reflection

The moon charms people, especially when its face is full during a cloudless night. It shines far more brightly than the stars and planets, and it helps us see when otherwise we would be nearly blind in the darkness of the night without flames and electrical devices. Artists have described the moon in their poetry, lyrics, and landscapes. Without the light of the moon, the world would be bereft of so much beauty.

Because the radiance of the moon has such mystical powers over us, we sometimes forget that the light of the moon is actually a reflection of the sun's light. As Christians, we also sometimes make that same mistake in that we feel the light we give off comes from our own goodness, forgetting that all the righteousness others see in us is really from Christ. It's not a conscious assumption on our part, but it shows in our attitude and behavior toward others.

God calls us to be a shining light to a fallen world. He does not call us to display our own self-righteousness. Instead, when we reflect the radiant light that comes from Christ, the darkness is dispelled and people will be drawn to Him.

Moreover, the radiant reflection from Christ is brightly shown through us when we praise Him for His righteousness and for the justice that He brings to the world. And such praise is truly marvelous when Christians from around the globe raise their voices in admiration of His goodness and godliness.

Therefore, let us from every nation sing the words of King David in praise of the Lord: "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1) and the Lord "leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps. 23:3, KJV).

10. Explain how self-righteousness can come across as hypocritical and judgmental.

11. When we recognize that any goodness in us is because Jesus has clothed us with His righteousness, how does that truth give purpose and meaning to our lives?

12. How does global praise to the Lord for His righteousness inspire you to walk more closely with Christ?

A Symphony of Praise

As a people, the Israelites were often unfaithful to their Lord God and His statutes. Nevertheless, God did not abandon them. Isaiah's portrait of the future included the astounding restoration of the nation and how such a miracle would reflect God's righteousness to the extent that all nations would praise the Lord, as we do now.

► *This next week, look for moments in which you can praise the Lord for His righteousness. Examples might include hearing about the miraculous rescue of individuals from danger, celebrating the goodness of the Lord with other Christians at church, and expressing a silent prayer for how He sustained your faith through a temptation. Also, check websites online to see how your praise is in concert with the praise of Christians around the world. Record what you find here.*

KEY VERSE

For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
—Isaiah 61:8, KJV

“For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.”
—Isaiah 61:8, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 27 through May 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Deuteronomy 30:1-6—God Promises Restoration of Israel's Fortunes.

Tues. Ezekiel 34:11-16—God Will Shepherd the People.

Wed. Zechariah 10:6-12—God Will Strengthen the People.

Thurs. Acts 5:27-32—Christ's Forgiveness of Israel's Sins.

Fri. Zephaniah 3:1-7—Leaders, Priests, and Prophets Don't Listen.

Sat. Zephaniah 3:8-13—God Will Preserve a Remnant.

Sun. Zephaniah 3:14-20—Rejoice in God's Glory and Salvation.