

January 14, 2007
Epiphany 2

"Shining with Righteousness"

ISAIAH 62:1-5

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. 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. ³ You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴ 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. 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.

Last week, we received a letter in the mail from the Publishers Clearing House. On the outside it announced that we could be a winner. And there are winners. It does happen. Someone does receive the knock on the door, and a check worth a several million dollars is placed into their hands. Television cameras record people screaming and shouting for joy when they hear the good news they have won.

The prophet Isaiah says that he just cannot keep silent. He cannot keep quiet. He has to shout about something exciting coming to the world, far more valuable than money that perishes. He cannot keep silent about a righteousness that shines like the dawn and salvation that blazes like a torch that makes us the ultimate winners.

What is a large amount of cash suddenly placed into your bank account in comparison to the righteousness of Christ that has been given to you free without cost? There is no comparison as to which is more valuable and which lasts forever. In a few verses previous to what we just read, Isaiah wrote, "I delight greatly in the Lord, by soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." As we just sang in the hymn: *Jesus, your blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head.* With the righteousness of Christ we know where we stand with God when we die, and we live each day knowing we are loved by our heavenly Father with a love that fills every day of our lives and every fiber of our being.

You shine with Jesus' righteousness

Isaiah said that he could not keep silent and he could not remain quiet for the sake of Jerusalem, and for the sake of Zion, "till her righteousness shines out like the dawn and her salvation like a blazing torch." Have you ever seen a torch blazing and burning on a dark night? Have you ever seen the sun rising in the east and filling the sky with light? The prophet sees righteousness and salvation blazing like torch and burning like the sun rising from Jerusalem and shining throughout the world. He says, "Nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory." The whole world will come to see the greatest

blessing for all humanity lies in what has happened to the nation of Israel when Jesus provided the world with a righteousness that allows God to love us and accept us.

Isaiah wrote these words to a people who were captives in Babylon and had no hope in their lives. They had turned their hearts against the Lord. They complained that the Lord had forgotten them and forsaken them. The problem was not with the Lord. It was with the people. In chapter one the Lord spoke these words through Isaiah, "Hear, O heavens! Listen O earth! For the Lord has spoken, "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.... Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evil-doers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel!" The Lord was tired of their sacrifices and attempts to cover their sin by being outwardly religious. He told his people, "When you spread you hands out in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you."

What God saw in Israel, his beloved people, he sees in our world today.. He sees people opening their lives to sin, and then justifying it or covering it or defending it by saying to themselves, "I still believe in God. I still pray! I still go to church once in awhile." The Lord becomes very tired of excuses that blame him for being far away. He is weary when we try to make ourselves acceptable by being a little bit religious here and there. When I read what the Lord says in Isaiah 59 I realize how much I need a righteousness outside of myself that is found only in Christ. "So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in shadows."

A church in America with the largest Sunday attendance of any church has on its web page this theme or mission statement. "Look for the champion in you!" When we look for righteousness that shines like the sun inside of ourselves we don't find anything but a champion. We find nothing that measures up to our own expectations, to what others expect of us, and certainly not to what our God requires.

That is why the prophet's words about a time and place in history when people will see righteousness shine like the sun and blaze like a torch is so important to us. The prophet says, "I cannot keep silent." He sees this righteousness coming and it fills him with joy. We look back and history and see this much needed righteousness in Jesus. John 1 says, "We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus lived the righteous life that no other people have ever lived.

No one has ever lived a life like Jesus. This past week I had a flight cancelled from Las Vegas to Santa Barbara. The airline put us up a hotel, not a very clean hotel and not very nice. I was able to keep my cool and not get upset and not treat people unkindly. But that is not always the case in my life and not always the case in your life either. You know what I am referring to.

Jesus never had a moment in his life when he was not shining with a righteousness and holiness that made him acceptable to his heavenly Father. Whether it was the dusty streets of Nazareth, or working in his father's carpenter shop, or speaking to large crowds of people along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus always treated people with utmost love and respect. He was totally loyal and faithful to everything the heavenly Father asked him to do. At his baptism the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am

well pleased." And when Jesus made the full payment for all sin by his death on the cross, the Father showed he accepted this sacrifice and payment by raising Jesus to life again. It is in this righteous life of Christ that shines like the sun and blazes like a torch that we have our hope of being righteous before God. As Paul said in Philippians about his trust in the righteousness of Christ, "That I might be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

"I delight greatly in the Lord, by soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." The righteousness of Christ has been credited to you and credited to me. That makes us the wealthiest people in the world. That leads us to want to live a new life to the Lord, get things back on track, say no to sinful behaviors of the past week, put the Lord first in all that we do.

You shine and the world takes notice

When you shine in your daily life, the nations of the world take notice. "The nations will see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow." The nation of Israel did not have much glory and honor when the people were captives in the land of Babylon. Read Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hang our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, sing us one of the songs of Zion."

Even today there are nations in the Mid East that would dance for joy in the streets if Israel were wiped off the map. They hate the name of Israel. The prophet Isaiah said that the time was coming when nations of people will speak highly of Israel because of the Messiah that was born in Bethlehem. Today people from all over the world want to travel to Israel just to walk the roads that Jesus walked, or stand on the shores of Sea of Galilee, or be near the place Jesus died and rose from the dead. Instead of being treated like dirt, Israel would be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hands.

Just as the nation of Israel was given the glory of being the place Jesus lived and died for us to provide salvation, you have also been given the glory of letting people see Jesus through you. Paul said, "We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 2 says, "We shine like stars as we hold out the word of life." Your life on this earth, lived for Christ, is precious to the Lord because the whole world has the privilege of seeing Jesus through your life and your words. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belong to God, that you may declare the praises of him who has called you of darkness into his wonderful light."

How does the Lord feel about your life that reflects the righteousness of Christ in everything you do? "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." See the homeless woman walking down the street. She has no husband who cares about her, no children who call her on the phone, no place to sleep in the cold, no friends that invite her to lunch, and even the people of the community turn their eyes when she walks down the street. That's how Israel was treated by nations of the world in

the past. But when people see Christ as their righteousness and their hope of peace with God, they see Israel as a beautiful place, the place where Jesus provided salvation and the hope of eternal life. Your life is parallel to that of Israel. Do you realize how precious you are to other people and to the Lord because you reflect the righteousness of Christ in every facet of your life? "For the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married." The Lord gives us names such as Hephzibah which means "my delight is in her" and Beulah which means "married." As we sing in the hymn, "From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died."

"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." See the young man and young woman on their wedding night. Take out your pictures and look at them again. See the smiles on your faces. The joy that you see in people who genuinely love each other in marriage is the joy that your God has in you as you shine with the righteousness that Christ has given to you. In all your tasks of life, and all your contacts with people, in your home life, whatever you do, you are privileged to exude a joy a million times greater than receiving a large gift of money. The Lord rejoices over who you are in Christ and his righteousness. The Lord also rejoices over how you are privileged to shine with this righteousness to other people. Amen.