

Jesus Brings Joy Through the Fulfilment of God's Gracious Purpose

A Sermon on Joy in God's Purpose

Sermon The Person and Work of Christ 16 January 2022

Isaiah 25:6-9

Jeremiah 9:1

John 17:13

Last month I was led to speak on the theme, "The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ." That was doctrinal in nature. Today we will meditate on how "Jesus brings joy through the fulfilment of God's gracious purpose" — the life application of His fulfilment. God's purpose, His plan of salvation, began right after the creation, and we concluded, in the last session, that only Jesus could have achieved it. That, therefore, may be considered Part One of fulfilment by Jesus. We will continue from where we left off, as Part Two, and see how Christ's fulfilment of the Old Testament affects humankind.

In my reckoning, no other prophet of the Old Testament prophesied with so much clarity and precision about Jesus Christ as Isaiah did. Let us, once again, fall back on Isaiah. The text for today, from chapter 25:6-9, reads, "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Notice the unique construction of the passage. God's purpose and its fulfilment are sandwiched between statements of what to expect once that happens — the great feast of joy on one side, and the wiping away of tears on the other. In between are God's purposes. In fulfilment of His first purpose, Jesus removes the covering cast over all people, and also the veil that is spread over all nations. It seems that, in the day and age we live in, many people are still caught in the invisible web of Satan. Many of us are covered by a thick veil or mist, and the bright, beautiful face of Jesus Christ is hidden from us, or is extremely dim. Many of us are trapped in a maze of keeping rules and regulations that we think is Christianity. We have reduced the Gospel to an ethical system. We know intellectually the story of Jesus, and we come to church on Sunday to "keep the rules." Jesus has destroyed this veil, this

maze. Jesus, as the light of the world, brings believers out from the darkness of sin and ignorance, into the light of God's truth. Remember, when He breathed His last on the Cross, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51), thus bridging the divide between God and His people. Christianity is all about intimacy with Jesus.

In fulfilment of His second purpose, as Isaiah prophesied in verse eight of the passage, Jesus would swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from off all faces. The reference here is not to a spiritual death, which is swallowed up in conversion, but to a corporeal and perpetual death: this death Christ has swallowed up in victory, by dying on the Cross, both with respect to Himself, who will never die more, and with respect to His people, from whom He has abolished it as a penal evil; but it points, too, to the resurrected state. Jesus demonstrated this in His resurrection, which in turn offers all believers the hope and joy of salvation, a state in which we shall live for eternity in the glorious presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

God's people are quick to weep — as we should weep for our own sins, so too for the sins of others. The prophet Jeremiah, in 9:1, said, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" And, indeed, good people will weep; they are quick to lament, not only for their own sins, but for the sins and misery of others. It is this tear that Jesus will wipe from the face of His people for ever. Today's passage from Isaiah concludes with the firm conviction that the Lord for whom we waited, Jesus Christ, will bring gladness and joy in the salvation of all His people.

A thought occurred to me that this sermon could end here. However, since we have the luxury of some time in hand, let us briefly examine each of these aspects — God's purpose for us, and the joy that we may experience in the fulfilment of His purpose — in a little more detail.

The question is not, what is my purpose for my life, but, what is God's purpose for my life? Are you confident that you know, and are fulfilling, God's purpose for your life? Not many would be. In our chaotic and unsettling world, it is sometimes hard to understand how God's purposes are being worked out in our lives. Whatever your case, in the midst of the confusion, fears, anxieties, and distractions of this present world, all of us can benefit from a firmer confidence that God is indeed working out His plans in our lives. How can we gain this confidence? We cannot work it up on our own, through human optimism, positive thinking, and worldly philosophies. Rather, it is produced by the Holy Spirit, who works primarily through Holy Scripture, which He uses to enlighten our minds and kindle faith in our hearts (Romans 10:17).

God's purpose for our lives has two major aspects: first, His purpose in

the present world as we know it; and, second, His purpose in the world to come, in His new creation — and these two are intricately intertwined. It is important to approach our need for guidance in the present world, urgent as it may seem, in the context of God's larger purposes. Once we situate ourselves within this framework, we can more readily discern and embrace God's purposes in the unique circumstances of our lives. Let us begin by reminding ourselves that the God of the Bible is a God of purpose — and not just general purposes, but specific ones. He is the supreme, long-term, strategic planner of the universe, planning forward and backward. He does nothing in a random or chaotic manner, and His purposes extend from eternity past to eternity future, encompassing not only the ultimate destiny of His creation, but our personal lives as well.

Let us look at God's purpose in the present. Between these two beautiful pictures — God's original, good creation, and God's new and glorious creation — lies a world that has been devastated by sin, suffering, and death. Thinking about this shifts our attention from the heavenly to the earthly, from the grand master-plan to its fulfilment through redemption. God's purposes continued to move toward fulfilment, initially through Abraham and the people of Israel, then, finally and supremely, through Jesus, God the Son. Jesus proclaimed the in-breaking of God's kingdom, and gave Himself up as a reconciling sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. His death appeared to have halted the kingdom dead in its tracks; but, after His glorious resurrection, He commissioned His followers to go into all the world and make disciples of all people everywhere. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's kingdom spread across the world from generation to generation. Jesus set each of His children upon a lifelong process of transformation, designed to conform them to His likeness and make them fit to live in His presence. As Augustine noted, "None can become fit for the future life, who hath not practised himself for it now."

I am sure you will not expect me, or anyone, to preach on God's purpose for eternity future in five or ten minutes. We have only some glimpses from the last book of the Holy Bible. Perhaps it can be a topic for deliberation, as Part Three of this series on fulfilment.

Speaking about the joy we experience with the help of God the Holy Spirit, I would say that, though chosen, rescued, and promised, God's people suffered severe consequences for their continual rejection of Him and His covenant. Ezra read from God's Word, and recited His law to the people, and they were shattered by the extent of their disobedience and rebellion. Their exile was severe, both in its brutality and in how it burned into the minds and identity of the people. Who were they, without the land, without the Temple? How were they to relate to God now? Was their special relationship also lost? The joy of the Lord is found on the road to restoration. God convicts us of sin, and

often our first reaction is guilt and shame; but those feelings never come from God. The joy of the Lord is a constant gladness, and cause to rejoice. It stems from an inner strengthening, from our relationship with Him. When Jesus died for us, He restored us to a peace with God that cannot be undone. A paraphrase of John 17:13 would read, "Now I am returning to You. I am speaking this prayer here in the created cosmos, alongside friends and foes, so that in hearing it they might be consumed with joy." Biblical joy is the result of a Christ-prioritised life. Amen.