The Shining Testimony

by Raymond Golsworthy

God's people are called to arise and shine, to be vessels of His glory, and to submit to His order, resulting in an eternal excellency and a shining testimony.

Scripture: Psalm 106:8, Isaiah 28:5, Isaiah 60:1, Isaiah 66:1, Daniel 12:3, Matthew 13:43, Luke 22:29, John 17:10, Romans 9:23, Romans 11:36, Ephesians 2:1, Revelation 21:10
Topics: "Gods Glory", "Church Restoration"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches on Isaiah 60, where God calls His people to 'Arise and shine' as His light and glory rise upon them. The chapter reveals God's plans for the resurrection and restoration of His people, leading to a shining testimony of His power and glory. Through five significant names given to the favored city, the sermon emphasizes God's desire for His Church to be the vessel of His glory, the place of His sanctuary, the place of His feet, an eternal excellency, and the branch of His planting, all pointing to the deep relationship between God and His redeemed people.

Transcript

Reading: Isaiah 60

Through His prophet Isaiah God issued a call to His people to "Arise and shine" accompanying the call with the words: "Thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee". Our God is a God of resurrection and, according to this chapter, He has plans to put forth His power for the re-gathering of His captive people, causing them to live again as He would have them live, and shine again as He would have them shine. This chapter shows the released captives returning at last from distant lands, and Jerusalem again restored to dignity and honour. And it shall not only be a return or a restoration, it shall be a resurrection, a whole national coronation, and the establishment once more of a shining testimony, from decimation to scintillation. Such, thank God, are the thoughts which He has towards us also, in our day. All this and more besides, He can do for us, in view of the resurrection and exaltation of His Son. Resurrection power is "to usward who believe."It will be noticed that this chapter of the shining glory is studded, or bejewelled, with five beautiful and significant names for the favoured city. Each name, of course, presents a particular aspect of God's spiritual city, the Church, raised and restored and shining again with His own glory, and it is our purpose, here, to draw attention to these five names.

"... the house of my glory ..."

In the first place the city is referred to as "the house of my glory" (verse 7). This has always been the thought of God concerning His Church, that it should be the vessel, or the herald, of His own majestic glory. We are plainly told in the Psalms that God saves "for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known" (Psalm 106:8). His present activity, basically speaking, is to make known His own glory and His redeemed people are the primary instrument that He is using to this end. The Lord Jesus said: "I am glorified in them" (John 17:10). We are amazed to find that God has planned to "make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had before prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23). Here is a truth which throws back our horizons and lifts the whole level of our spiritual outlook. And it supplies us with entirely new objectives and ambitions, we see that we are related to something very deep and very far-reaching for God's own satisfaction, namely the revelation of His glory. This promise of verse 7 speaks of God glorifying the house of His glory. We may be sure that this is what He always has in view when He turns the captivity of His people and makes them to rise and shine in the power of Christ's resurrection.

"... the place of my sanctuary ..."

Further down in the chapter we find another arresting name for the people of the Lord. They are called "the place of my sanctuary" (verse 13). The simple thought here is that God's people are the chosen and anointed place where He Himself delights to dwell. Redeemed sinners though they be, they have actually become God's home. They are now renewed in Christ, and God can find His rest among them. How essential it is for God's people to understand this truth right from the beginning! Individually we are indwelt, and corporately we are indwelt; indwelt by the very God who has redeemed us. The same Isaiah gives us one of the great revelations in the whole of Scripture: "Thus saith the Lord ... where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? ... but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2). Once we have known our inward poverty and have learned to tremble at God's Word, obeying it gladly and implicitly, we become 'the place of His rest'. And surely the more we are weakened as to ourselves, and the more we go on to obey, the more delight does God find in taking His deep rest among us.

Our verse goes on to say that God will 'beautify' the place of His sanctuary. This is something which we can easily understand for, at some time or other, we have set ourselves the happy task of making as beautiful as possible the place which we call 'home', decorating it with furnishings and flowers. The real beauty of His house, however, is due to His love and His all-pervading presence, without which there can be no true beauty in His Church. Only He can bring in the beauty: "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people" (Isaiah 28:5).

"... the place of my feet ..."

Yet another name for the happy and shining city is "the place of my feet" (verse 13). This seems to add something of great significance to what we have just mentioned. The appended title seems to say that God's Church, infinitely blessed and favoured as it is seen to be, should at the same time consist of those who are altogether submitted to Him, completely under Him and glad to have it so. The redemption of God's people actually constitutes the recovery of an essential order in His creation. Those who accept the operation of that order soon discover it to be something completely beneficent and a total joy. What better place can any creature find than to be at the feet of his Creator? It is good to realise that the word 'Israel' not only means 'Prince with God' but also 'Ruled by God'. The two titles are inseparable, the first being the issue of the second.

It is a tragic story how man originally lost his highest privileges and possibilities by choosing to reject this place at God's feet. Instead he aspired to be alongside God in personal importance and position, and failed to realise that to continue in happy submission to God would make him 'the man of God's right hand'. Was it not by being 'at Jesus' feet' that Mary discovered the one thing that was needful, which would not be taken away from her? (Luke 10:38-42). The Church urgently needs to learn, or relearn, this lesson in our day. It needs to recover the emphasis implied by this title, and to beware of the unworthy and even casual approach which is all too common even in Christian circles. Modern thoughts about God and His Son are not only unworthy, they are audacious and insolent: our attitude should always be of awe and reverence, even though we find ourselves so honoured in Christ. We need to learn, as John did, that it is when we are at His feet that Christ can lay His right hand on us, and commission us to serve in the outworking of His purpose (Revelation 1:17-19).

"... an eternal excellency ..."

The next title follows very naturally from this point. God says to the shining city which is the place of His feet: "I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations" (verse 15). Who can measure the grace and goodness which lie behind such a resplendent title? A people who had been under divine judgment, scattered far away in an apparently hopeless captivity, was now to be raised up, made to glow with divine glory by a miracle which would live on and be seen for ever. The needed judgement had run its course, and death itself has now been conquered. In the New Testament there is, of course, much which emphasises and develops this wonderful fact. Looking right on into eternity, the Lord Jesus said: "Then shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43) and speaking of those who had been prepared to share at least something of His trials and sufferings, He said: "I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father appointed unto me" (Luke 22:29). Even the prophets of the Old Testament had begun to see something of this vision for Daniel stated: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). It is part of God's plan that His people shall be beautiful for ever.

"... the branch of my planting ..."

The fifth and final title in this chapter is perhaps the most significant and certainly the most challenging. God describes His people as the branch of His planting (verse 21). Evidently the Lord would have us know very clearly that this people whom He has been describing is a people whom He Himself has brought into being. He is the One who planted this branch--it is the work of His hands. Paul tells us that "we are his workmanship" seeing that we have been 'raised' and are shining with God's glory (Ephesians 2:1-10). The whole shining testimony is "of him" and therefore "unto him" (Romans 11:36).

In this connection it is important to notice that the New Jerusalem is described as the city which descends "out of heaven from God, having the glory of God:" (Revelation 21:10). The picture is most impressive, almost startling--a city descending from God out of heaven--but the meaning is, in fact, very simple. It just means that God Himself is the originator of this city; it is all the result of what He is and what He has done. Over the whole shining glory, then, we write the word: 'God did it'. It is the branch of His planting, the work of His hands.

We close by noticing the strange expression concerning the planting of a branch. We often speak of planting a seed or planting a tree, but we do not normally speak of planting a branch. Why, then, does God use this expression? Can it be that God is reminding us that the Church is really the branch of Christ?

Christ is the seed that was sown at the cross, and He is really the whole vine which has emerged. But we are the branch of that emerging vine and are able, in Him, to bring forth fruit unto God. So we may say that the branch was also planted in His planting, raised in His resurrection and made partaker of His glory--the branch of His planting. It is this that we meant in suggesting that this fifth and final title is the most challenging of them all. The shining testimony is the issue of the cross. And the degree of our entering into the calling will be the degree of our participation in the cross. When we are prepared to be planted in His planting, then we shall be correspondingly raised in His resurrection, and be partakers with Him in His own eternal glory. What is 'old' and 'natural' has to fall into the ground and die. There is no other way. This shining testimony, in all its parts, is the fruit of Christ's travail and the issue of His cross.

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