

March 3, 2018

A Nation Brought Forth **Isaiah 66: 7 – 14**

Our sermon text this morning will be Isaiah 66, verses 7 to 14. Before we read that, we'll pray. Please if you would join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would indeed bless your word to us now. We pray that we would be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts which understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So as I've said, Isaiah 66. This morning the sermon text is verses 7 to 14. Hear the word of the Lord:

“⁷ Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. ⁸ Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. ⁹ Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?’ says the LORD; ‘shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?’ says your God.

“¹⁰ Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; ¹¹ that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.’

“¹² For thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. ¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.’” Amen. And may God bless His word to us.

In Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18, which is the passage where the Apostle Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, part of what Jesus said to Peter was, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” I will build my church. And whether we see it or not, or whether we see it at first reading, this is what Isaiah is getting to here. The Lord will build His church.

The church is not, strictly speaking, a New Testament thing. The church, the called-out ones, the gathering, has been being built from the very beginning. The church was in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were the church. The church is all of those who have saving faith, all of those who have justifying faith, from the time of creation through to the very end of this present evil age. All of those who are saved become the church, the one body of Christ, the one true gathering of the people of God. All enter the church by the same means. They must be reborn by the power of the Spirit of God.

This being “reborn by the power of the Spirit of God” is the thing that brings to a person the gift of faith, and they exercise that faith. We have faith. It’s a gift. It’s given, but we must do it, we must use it. And our faith is in God’s Savior.

Those who were saved before Jesus came to this world were saved through faith in the coming Messiah. When God judged the serpent, He did so in the hearing of Adam and Eve, and in His judgment upon the serpent, He said what? “A seed of the woman will come, and he shall bruise the head of the serpent.”

And that was the promise of the gospel to Adam and Eve. That was the promise that they took hold of—that God would indeed punish the serpent, that Eve would indeed—though they may not have thought it was through the generations, the very fact that she named her firstborn son “I have gotten a man,” indicates that she possibly thought that she’d already given birth to the Savior. But they believed that the Savior was coming. They believed the promise of God.

We who are alive now, after Jesus has walked this earth and done His work of salvation, we are saved through faith in that same Savior. We believe in the completed works of our Savior. We believe that Jesus satisfied God’s righteous requirements, and that He died in our place. But not only that He died in our place, as it were, He lived in our place. His righteousness is imputed to us so that we might be righteous in the very sight of God.

The passage speaks of Zion and Jerusalem. It speaks of this city of God, where the people of God are to be found. And when you look at the passage, you notice that it says that Zion, or Jerusalem, gives forth a son, that this son that is brought forth—just looking quickly through verses 7 and 8, and we’re going to break it down and get a little bit more detailed—but the son is a nation. And then having given birth to a son, who is a nation, Zion gives birth to children—many children, many sons.

We’ve already read Revelation chapter 12. Notice that in Revelation chapter 12, there’s a woman who gives birth to a son who rules the nations with a rod of iron. And then at the end of the chapter, down at Revelation chapter 12, she gives birth to offspring. She has a son, and then she has sons, offspring—“many who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

Though Isaiah spoke to the people of God concerning their coming Babylonian captivity and their return from captivity, he speaks to all the people of God, throughout all the ages. He speaks of the church. After all, the only true deliverer of Israel was to be the servant, the son of David, the one who would truly satisfy God. All other salvations were only, in a way, types or signs or pointers to the actual true and final salvation that comes through Jesus Christ.

So I've got our passage today broken down into three sections. Verses 7 to 9, I've simply called "The Nation Brought Forth." Verses 10 to 11 is called "The Joy of Her Offspring." And verses 12 to 14 I've called "Peace, Comfort, and the Knowledge of God to the Dwellers of Jerusalem."

So let's have a look at it. Verses 7 to 9, The Nation Brought Forth. "7 'Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.'" Now what's this saying? What's Isaiah's point here?

Well, once again, I've already mentioned Genesis chapter 3, and the fact that God judged the man and the woman and the serpent, when sin entered into the Garden. Well, what was one of the judgments of God upon the woman? Genesis chapter 3 and verse 16: "In pain you shall bear children." The labor of childbirth will be a painful thing.

It's amazing. You look at all of creation, and even just look simply at domesticated animals. Have you noticed that for our pets, for the animals that we keep, it's not that difficult a thing for them to give birth? They find a nice quiet spot, and generally speaking, they simply produce their offspring. Immediately, they're ready to look after their offspring. They're up and about. They're feeding them. They're doing whatever it is that their type and their nature requires of them concerning their offspring.

But for a woman, producing a child is labor. For some, it lasts for days on end. For some, it is indeed incredibly painful. For some, they are actually unable to do things like run their household for a week or two afterwards—and even worse for some. Childbearing for a woman is no easy thing. And here, God through Isaiah speaks of one who has no labor, yet gives birth—one who delivers a son before her pains come upon her.

That does indeed create a little bit of a conflict with the reading from Revelation chapter 12. If you want to turn to Revelation chapter 12, it speaks of the fact that there was a woman who was in labor. She was pregnant and crying out in birth pains in the agony of giving birth.

What it appears to me is that Isaiah is trying to tell us, not so much about the pain of delivery disappearing, but what he's trying to tell us is that this one who is born is not born under the curse of sin. If the result of sin is that a woman has pain in giving birth, why would Isaiah therefore tell us that there's one who gives birth before she's in labor, that before pain comes upon her, she delivers a son? Because she's giving birth apart from the curse of sin. I think this points us to Jesus.

I'm not saying that Mary had a magical painless birth. Don't mistake Mary for the woman of Revelation chapter 12, or for the woman spoken of here in Isaiah 66. I'm quite certain that the woman spoken of is actually the church. Now ladies like Eve and Mary may both be in some ways typical of the church, but they are not, in and of themselves, the church. This son who is born is born apart from the curse of sin. We're told Jesus had no earthly father. We're told that

the virgin conceived. Isaiah chapter 7 tells us, “Behold, a virgin will conceive.” Jesus was born apart from the curse of sin, and He’s a son who was born in righteousness.

Verse 8, then, if we read on: “Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.” Now Zion has labor. But at the start of verse 8, we’re told that a nation is born in one moment—a nation. A nation born in one moment.

We need to break this down a little more. We need to bring some other texts to bear. This son that the woman brings forth in Revelation chapter 12, it tells us specifically that he is born to rule over the nations with a rod of iron. Verse 5—Revelation 12, verse 5: “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.”

Now there’s a theme that runs through Scripture, and I’ll explain it very briefly. The one who comes with the scepter, or the rod of iron, that’s the Savior. And so we’re told that the scepter, for example in the latter parts of the book of Genesis, “shall not depart from Judah.” King David was born of Judah, and then Jesus is ultimately born into the house of David.

And this one who rules by the scepter is spoken of in Psalm 2, and Psalm 110, and Psalm 45—many different places in Scripture. In Psalm 2, God says, “You are my son; this day I have begotten you. And you shall rule the nations with a rod of iron.”

Psalm 110 says, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. And you shall rule in the midst of your enemies!”

And Psalm 45, which I read from at the start of our service, tells us that the scepter of this king is a scepter of righteousness. Just turn to Psalm 45, verse 6: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; ⁷ you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

Now think about that. It says “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” You’ve got God ruling on a throne with a scepter, which is a scepter of righteousness, and yet God ruling on a throne is anointed by God “with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” How do we understand that?

Well, for those of us who are born after the coming of Jesus, for those of us who are members of the church, we understand that well and truly. Jesus, God, the Son of God, who took upon Himself flesh, now reigns on high at the right hand of God with a scepter of righteousness in His

hand, and God has anointed Him—God has anointed God—the ruler of His kingdom—this Son, brought forth from Zion.

In Revelation chapter 12, we're told that the woman was crowned with the sun, the moon, and the stars, and there were twelve stars. And once again, if you trace this out through Scripture, you find that this is a symbolic way of describing Israel. Jesus was indeed born an Israelite. He was born of Israel. Zion brought forth her own Savior. She gave birth to her own Son, the one who rules. And yet Zion also brings forth other children. For as soon as Zion was in labor—looking at Isaiah 66, the end of verse 8—“she brought forth her children.”

Once again, I just remind you—and we've spoken of it, but remember—the woman in Revelation 12 gives birth both to the Son who rules, and to offspring, who keep the commandments of God and bear the testimony of Jesus. She, the church, gives birth to the Savior, and the church gives birth to the church!

So that's one of the ways that we who study the Scripture come to the conclusion that there is one church, and has always and only ever been one church, made up of the faithful people of God—whether they were found in old covenant times in the nation of Israel or not, ultimately, there's one and one only church.

What else are we to understand here? Well let's just keep looking here at verse 8: “Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?” That's the question there in verse 8. “Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?”

In Matthew chapter 2, verse 15, Matthew quotes Hosea chapter 11, verse 1. Remember he says of Jesus, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” Jesus was taken down into Egypt to escape persecution at the hand of King Herod. “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

When Jesus came out of Egypt, how did He come into His open ministry, His public ministry? I don't mean the fact that Joseph brought Him back to Israel. But I simply mean when Jesus became a public figure, when He was publicly announced to be the Messiah, He passed through the Jordan, as the people of Israel passed through the Jordan. And when the people of Israel passed through the Jordan, what did they pass into? They passed into the promised land, where they did what? They fought. They went to war. They fought to conquer the promised land.

Jesus went to Egypt, He was brought from Egypt back to Israel, He passed through the Jordan. What's the very next thing that happens in His life? He fights. He fights for the promised land. He's driven off, out into the wilderness, to do what? To do battle with Satan himself. The temptations in the desert, or the wilderness, that's the battle. That's the battle with those who were occupying the promised land. Jesus came to retake the earth, though the battle is all concentrated down over the nation of Israel, or Judah, at that time—Judea. That's what's happening. Jesus has gone through the Jordan and He's come to take that which was promised. Jesus is the nation.

So the woman bears a son, the son is the nation. He is the true Israel, He is the seed of Abraham, which we find in Galatians chapter 3, verse 16—the singular “Seed” of Abraham. And we, born of Jesus, are born of the same woman, the same church, the same heavenly Jerusalem, the same Zion. We are the nation that was born when Jesus was born. You see, we’re united to Christ through faith. We’re counted as one with God through faith in Christ. We’re one with our Savior. Our life is hidden in Him. We indeed are His children. We are the offspring of God.

Just turn to First Peter chapter 2, reading verses 4 to 10: “⁴ As you come to him,” now Peter here is speaking of Jesus, “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

“⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ ⁸ and ‘A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

“⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

What does Peter say of the church? “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.”

Turn back now into Isaiah 66. We have Zion, we have Jerusalem, Jerusalem delivers a son. The son is a nation, and the son himself causes Zion to bring forth many children—many children. And God says, “Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?” Looking at verse 9: “says the LORD; ‘shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?’ says your God.”

What’s God saying? These things are sure and these things are certain. The church will indeed be fruitful. People will indeed be born in Zion. As Psalm 87 says, “My plans will not fail.” The promise is, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” I will build my church.

Let’s now look at the next part, verses 10 and 11. I’ve simply called it The Joy of Her Offspring. Let’s read it: “¹⁰ ‘Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; ¹¹ that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.’”

So what do we have here? Well, we have a nation born of Zion, which then returns back to Zion for that which God is giving it. We have people born of Jerusalem, born of the heavenly Jerusalem, who turn back to Jerusalem to receive there that which God supplies, that which God gives. God gives them what? God gives them what He calls here “the milk.” “You may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.” First Peter 2:2 reads, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

Here’s the thing. Having put His church into the world, God’s way of dealing with His people and with humanity is through His church. Those who isolate themselves from the church are isolating themselves from the food that God gives, God’s normal way of dealing with people. I’m not talking about perhaps a missionary. You might send two, four missionaries, whatever, off out into unknown lands. There they’re separated from the regular congregations of the Lord. They’re a different thing. They’re not regular, everyday worshipers, if they’ve been ordained and sent forth as missionaries.

We who can attend a church, we who can be under the authority of a church, we who can attend the preaching of the word and receive this pure spiritual milk—we have to be there. We’re not actually given a choice. How does God feed His people? He feeds them from the very place that they were born, He feeds them through the Zion where they were given birth. He feeds people through the church that preaches the gospel.

There are so many people, just in our town alone—I know I’ve raised this point before, but there are so many people just in our town, our district, close to us, who think that they can be Christians off there on their own. They think that they can get their fellowship and their teaching via the Internet. They think they’re serving God, and they’re not. They are not.

They are not gathering with Zion. They are not gathering with God’s people. They are not thirsting and hungering for God’s preached word. They’re not strengthening and building His church. They’re living their own lives. They are being, indeed, selfish and disobedient. Some of them may well be Christians, some of them may not. I’m not appointed to judge their hearts. But, separate yourself from Zion where you were born, and you’ve separated yourself from the usual means of grace. It’s clear here, just in what we’re reading in Isaiah.

“The same mother that gives birth to you.” And reading some of the ancient preachers, people like Augustine, this is one of the reasons they said things like, “To be Christian, God must be your Father; but the church must be your mother.” The church must be your mother.

Now I know that the Roman Catholics take hold of that concept and they make too much of it, and they claim to be the one and the only true church, and everyone else is off away from there. Don’t pay any attention to the publicity that they put forth these days. Their dogma has never changed.

As far as they're concerned, they are the only true church, and anyone who is not a part of Rome is not a part of the church. And so they take that line: If you are born of God, God must be your Father and the church must be your mother—and they apply it strictly to themselves.

The true church where the gospel is preached—I'm not talking about denominations, I'm not talking about particular buildings or particular gatherings of people. If God is your Father, you must be in a true church where the gospel is preached, that the church be your mother, that you may, as Peter says, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation." This is God's normal way of dealing with people.

You know, I've been thinking a bit during the last few weeks for some reason—I've had a lot of the book of Proverbs on my mind, and a lot of the Proverbs running through my mind, and the thought has occurred to me that if you wanted to subtitle the book of Proverbs, or give perhaps a sentence that in some ways sums up the book of Proverbs, I think what I'd say is something like this: The way God does things is usually by the most obvious means you can imagine. That's what the book of Proverbs is telling us. The way God does things is usually by the most obvious means that you can imagine.

So Proverbs tells you, The lazy man will have nothing because he's too lazy to have anything! The diligent man will receive the blessing of God because he's working according to the law of God, and according not only to God's revealed law, but God's natural law, revealed to us through nature. The lazy parent will have wicked children, but the diligent parent who raises his children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord has hopes for the salvation of their child. Why? Because God works through the most obvious means.

It's not for believers to put themselves in the situation where nothing can work unless God does a miracle. We're not to test God. We're not to throw ourselves from the top of the temple, to use a picture from Scripture. God uses normal means. You want to know the word of God? Don't expect to receive it by magical Holy Spirit power. You want to know the word of God? Discipline yourself to read it regularly and often and repetitively, and you will know the word of God. It's the most obvious means!

You want deeper understanding of the word of God? Then you need to set yourself under the teaching of the word of God, where it's explained. I hope I'm helping you to understand the word of God. It's definitely what I'm trying to do. It's the most obvious means. That's what the book of Proverbs is telling us, and what Isaiah is telling us right here is the most obvious means by which Christians are strengthened, helped, encouraged, picked up when they fall, built up when they need building up, brought down when they need to be brought down.

The most obvious means by which these things happen is that the church which gave you birth should be the church which nourishes you and leads you on. And once again, I'm not saying a particular church of a particular denomination—I'm simply saying a true, gospel-preaching

church, where you hear the word of God explained and applied clearly and carefully. That's what Isaiah's saying. The church must be our mother.

Let's have a look at the last part, verses 12 to 14: Peace, Comfort, and the Knowledge of God to the People of Jerusalem. Verse 12: "For thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees.'"

You see here the promise of God's peace to this heaven-borne Jerusalem. "Peace like a river." That's obviously why we're going to sing "It is well with my soul" as our closing hymn—"When peace like a river." "I will extend to her peace like a river." Notice again, the picture of a child being cared for by a parent. "You shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees." You shall nurse, where? At your mother Zion. And your mother Zion will do what? She will carry her.

Now here's something we need to get clear. And once again, Isaiah is helping us. Turn to Isaiah chapter 40. Let's just see it in the text of Scripture. I've told you before, there's a reason why the three synoptic gospels start with reference to this early part of Isaiah chapter 40. How does it start? "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."

What's God saying? Well look, He's speaking to Jerusalem. And what's He saying to Isaiah? "Speak comfort to Jerusalem. Speak comfort to my people." Jerusalem receives comfort from God through the word of God. And then in Isaiah 66, Jerusalem, or Zion, ministers comfort to the nations that are drawn into her. "The glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. ¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you." That's Isaiah 66.

That which the church receives from God is that which the church ministers to its people. If this is God's usual means, I say once again, how are you supposed to lay hold of it? And the answer is simple. You've got to be part of a church. You've got to be under the teaching of the gospel. You've got to be under the teaching of God's word.

Notice that it says here—I'll read it to you—back in Isaiah chapter 66: "You shall be carried upon her hip." Keep your Bibles open at Isaiah chapter 40, and move down to verse 11, speaking of the Savior. We'll start reading at Isaiah chapter 40, verse 10: "Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."

The Savior comes with a ministry of shepherding and what? Carrying—carrying the lambs. He will carry the lambs in His arms. The church has a ministry of what? Carrying. Carrying her

children. “You shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” Isaiah 66, from the end of verse 12 into 13.

If you want to be dealing much with God, if you want to be receiving much blessing from God, if you want to be growing in the word of God, if you want to be receiving the pure milk of the word that we’re commanded to hunger for like a baby—you get it from the church. Yes, Bible study on our own is good. I recommend everybody does it regularly, often. Prayer on our own is good. I recommend everybody does it regularly, often. But being part of the church is being part of the heavenly Zion, and it’s being on the “heavenly express delivery system”—let’s call it that. That which God does, He is now doing through His church.

And let’s look at the last part, verse 14 of Isaiah 66: “You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.” Your bones shall flourish like the grass.

Turn back to Isaiah chapter 58, verse 11. God’s promise to His people. “And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” He shall make your bones strong. Now what’s this saying? Well if we pick up a contrast here, I think we’ll understand what this is saying.

So now turn into the book of Psalms, to Psalm 6, for example. Psalm 6 is a prayer of confession and repentance. Psalm 6, verse 1: “O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. ²Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. ³My soul also is greatly troubled.” Rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. The Psalmist acknowledges his sinfulness, and that he deserves God’s judgment. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.

Turn also to Psalm 32, reading from verse 1. Once again, a psalm of confession and repentance, and also thanksgiving. Psalm 32, verse 1: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ²Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”

What’s the Psalmist saying when he speaks of his bones—and there are other Psalms we could turn to—what’s he saying? He’s saying that the guilt of sin is like something that was destroying him from the inside out. He’s using what he’s calling the weakness, or the wasting of his bones, to indicate just how much damage his sinfulness was doing to himself, and speaking of the fact that when he covered his sins, when he did not confess his sin, his sins were eating his strength away from the inside out.

Now turn back to Isaiah chapter 66, verse 14: “You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants.” Your bones shall flourish like the grass. You’ve been cleansed of your sins. You’ve been washed, you’ve been cleansed, you’ve been made whole. You’ve been made strong again.

You’re not being eaten from the inside out, you’re actually being strengthened from the inside out. You’ve been taken from the place of judgment and put into the place of blessing. Through what? Through this preaching of the word of God, through heavenly Jerusalem. This is one of the benefits of being part of a true, God-honoring, gospel-preaching, word-of-God-teaching church.

And when your bones are flourishing like the grass, it says, “and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants.” Isaiah 53: To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? It’s known to His servants. God has revealed Himself to us. We see His work in our lives.

And in closing out, Isaiah says, “and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.” He shall show His indignation against His enemies. As always. As always, it’s impossible for God not to set a difference between His people and those who are not His people. It’s impossible for God not to separate the sheep from the goats.

I love in the book of Exodus where God brings the judgment of darkness upon the land of Egypt, and there’s just that little line that just says, “But there was light in the house of the Israelites.” There was light in the house of the Israelites. The whole land is in darkness—a darkness that could be felt. But there was light in the house of the Israelites.

God is always setting a difference between those who are His and those who are not. God is always setting a difference. He’s always making His people like a light upon the hill. He is always doing this. God’s people live a different life to those who are not God’s people.

You know, some of us know that through harsh experience. Some of us have grown up in families that were not Christian, and we’ve seen the chaos and the destruction that sin has worked in the lives of our families. We’ve seen the bitter divorces, and the fights, and the drunkenness, and the foolishness. We’ve seen that destruction first-hand.

God shows His indignation against His enemies. Remember, it doesn’t say they’re our enemies, it says they’re His enemies. I’m not saying that we’re to hate our families, and I’m not saying we’re to hate those who are not Christians. We’re commanded to pray for them, and to pray that God is merciful. We’re commanded to pray for their salvation. But understand this—God is always setting a distinction, always. He’s always distinguishing between His people and those who are not His people.

The blessings are to be found by being born of Zion. The blessings are to be found by being fed at the breast of Zion, to use Isaiah’s picture. And it’s not a picture I would normally use, but here

it is in Scripture right in front of us. We're like babies, relying on our mother to feed us. And we get fed through a good gospel-preaching, Bible-teaching church.

And those who are outside are being shown the indignation of God. Remember, Scripture does say that they are the enemies of God. It says that before we were saved, we were enemies of God, that we were vessels of wrath, that we were under the judgment of God, just as they are.

The indignation of God is being shown, even today. God judges now. God judges today. In Psalm 7, we're told that God is angry every day—angry every day. Yet even so, He saves and blesses His people. He saves and blesses those who have been born and who are marked down as having been born in Zion—those who are born of the church.

As it says in the song we sang, “Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God.” Just looking at that last verse: “Savior, if of Zion’s city I, thro’ grace, a member am,” and the last line: “none but Zion’s children know.” John Newton knew a thing or two about writing a hymn.

So, my friends, I think we've made plenty of application as we've gone along the way here. Isaiah speaks of the church, the church universal, the church catholic, the church mighty, the church from the beginning through to the end, the church in which all of God's people are to be found, and in which all of God's people are to be fed. And our relationship with our church is very indicative of our relationship with our God. I won't say it's impossible for a person to be a Christian and not be a member of a church, but it's certainly, most certainly, not what you find described in Scripture. And to be in that situation is to indeed be in open rebellion against the will of God, for whatever reason. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you that you do reveal wondrous things to us in your word, and that you do feed us like babies at the breast, that you do watch over us, that you have given us a birth place, that we are members of heavenly Zion, that we have been born by your Spirit into your church. Our Father, I pray that we would truly be your servants, through serving and building and strengthening your church. Father, we pray that you would use us in this, that we would be obedient to your will. We ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.