

The People of Zion **Isaiah 52: 1 – 2**

Our text for this evening's sermon is from Isaiah chapter 52, and we're going to look only at the first two verses. Isaiah 52, verses 1 and 2. Before that reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, as we come now to hear from your word, and as I seek to speak from your word, I pray Father that we would be given worshipful hearts to receive your word for what it is, the word of the living God, the very truth of all truths, something which we must receive and revere, which we must bend our knee to, which we must learn from, which we must take into ourselves, bury in our heart, and that we must digest and seek to understand it with the help of your Holy Spirit.

And so we pray, Father, that by your Spirit, you would indeed help us to understand your word. May we be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand and to obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 52, reading only the first two verses: “¹Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. ²Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.” Amen. And may God bless His word.

As I said, or as you're already aware, we're looking only at two verses. And there's a lot to be found in these two verses of Scripture. Zion, Jerusalem, the Holy City—this is a theme that Isaiah has returned to again and again and again. He's spoken, in particular, using the words “Zion”, which he uses 47 times in his whole prophecy.

Now Zion, Mount Zion, is the holy hill in Jerusalem, Jerusalem being a city that's in high lands, on a plateau between mountains. And Zion is a mountain, or a hill if you like, in the ancient city of Jerusalem, and it's the site of Jewish temple-based worship.

Last week in Isaiah chapter 51, we looked at the fact that God makes promises. He promises that His arm would be revealed to the nations, and that the nations hope for the revelation of this arm of the Lord. And we sort of cheated a little in a way, and we moved forward in the book of Isaiah last week, and we worked out the fact that the arm of the Lord is indeed the servant who would suffer for the sins of the people. We looked at Isaiah 53, verse 1, and we read: “Who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

The Lord offers comfort and promises to His people, and His people pray. Verse 9 of Isaiah 51: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD.” The Lord speaks comfort to His people, once again, in verses 12 to 16. He speaks to the people of the fact that He is indeed going to save them, that He does indeed have a plan for His faithful people. And then in verse 17 of Isaiah 51, God speaks to His people and He speaks to Jerusalem: “Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.”

God spoke to His people under the name of Jerusalem, and He made promises to them that He would save them, that this cup of judgment would be passed away from them, and that eventually those who are their enemies and those who persecute them would be the ones who swallow that cup of God's judgment, and they won't ever get over it. It's going to have permanent effects on those to whom God passes His judgment.

Well, Isaiah 52 repeats that command. Isaiah 52, verse 1: "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean."

God, in speaking to Zion, in speaking to Jerusalem, I want to suggest to you that though probably to Isaiah and those who heard these promises, their thinking would have been that God's promising to restore Israel. God's promising to strengthen the nation of Israel. God's promising that we will once again be the people of God in the land of God, that Israel will rule the world.

I think God is actually speaking of the salvation that He's planning to work through His servant, and those who are Zion are actually the church, the church of the living God. The Old Testament church and the New Testament church, in the end, are only one church. All who believe are the body of Christ. Those who were believers in Old Testament, or old covenant times, are the same as believers in New Testament, or new covenant times, in that we believe in the one Saviour and are saved through identification with that one Saviour. So Isaiah speaks to Zion.

If we were to look through the Psalms, we'd find that, once again, Zion is spoken of 38 times in the Psalms. And some of those uses in the Psalms are really quite important. Let's have a look at a few of those. Turn to Psalm 2. Now Psalm 2 has long been known to be a Messianic Psalm. It's a psalm concerning the reign of the Lord's Anointed. We know from the New Testament that Psalm 2 is written by King David himself. We'll read from verse 1: "¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ³ 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶ 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.' ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'"

Think about that. The nations rage, the peoples plot, and God says, "I'm not worried about this. I'm not interested. This doesn't trouble me. You've got kings, you've got plans, you've got rulers. That's all very amusing." Why? God has set His King on Zion, His holy hill. Then He says, "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'"

Now we know from the way this psalm is interpreted in the New Testament that these words are given to us, speaking directly of the rule and the reign of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to earth, He took upon Himself flesh, He lived in the sight of God a perfectly pleasing life, and after His crucifixion, He was resurrected, and after He was resurrected, He ascended on high and is seated at the right hand of the Father. There He reigns. And He reigns from Zion. God said, "I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." Just remember that, and let's have a look at a couple other psalms.

Turn to Psalm 87. Now we opened our service singing this psalm. Psalm 87, starting at verse 1: “¹ On the holy mount stands the city he founded; ² the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. ³ Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. ⁴ Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—‘This one was born there,’ they say. ⁵ And of Zion it shall be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her’; for the Most High himself will establish her. ⁶ The LORD records as he registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’”

Notice that in this psalm, which speaks a great deal of Zion, it makes the point that those who are the Lord’s people are registered as having been born *in* Zion. “This one was born there.” But in verse 4, we’re told, “Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush.” “‘This one was born there,’ they say.” Nations apart from Israel, Gentile nations, godless nations, nations outside of what the Jews would have called the Circumcision, and those who know God, are counted as having been born in Zion. Remember from Psalm 2, it’s in Zion that God set His King, or it’s on the hill of Zion that God set His King, who rules over all the nations.

Stay in the Psalms, and move to Psalm 110. From verse 1: “¹ The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ ² The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! ³ Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.”

Now it’s often said by the commentators that Psalm 110 seems to be a direct answer to Psalm 2. Remember Psalm 2 says that God sets His King upon Zion, His holy hill. Well now, the LORD, capitalized YAHWEH, says to “my ADONAI.” David seems to be speaking of two people, speaking as though they’re God—two people.

“‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’ The Lord sends forth from Zion”—once again, we have this mention of Zion—“your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!” And once again, I tell you—and we won’t go to all of these references, but if we look in the New Testament at how this psalm is used, it speaks of Jesus. Psalm 110 is the most commonly cited psalm in the New Testament concerning the Messianic ministry of Jesus.

And now let’s look at how the New Testament handles the idea of Zion. I know we already read it as we opened the service this evening, but turn to Hebrews chapter 12 once again, and we’ll read from verse 18. Now remember, in Hebrews chapter 12, the author is assuring the people that what they have done is that they have joined themselves to the living God through worshiping Jesus; that through worshiping Jesus, they have a better covenantal relationship with God than they ever could have had under the old covenant economy.

Hebrews 12, starting at verse 18: “¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.” Now that’s a reference to the law and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

“²⁰For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ ²¹Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’ ²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

What am I trying to establish here? To come to Mount Zion is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. “You have come,” verse 22, “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”—the heavenly Jerusalem—in the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, from which goes forth the scepter of the Lord, who was spoken to by Jehovah in Psalm 110. You have come to that Zion.

So in light of what we have in our New Testaments, we can understand that to any Old Testament reader who reads Isaiah 52, and reads Isaiah speaking of Zion and Jerusalem, the holy city, from that they take hope that God’s people will indeed once again be re-established in Jerusalem upon this earth, in the land of Judea where they will once again hope to have temple worship, which indeed happened after the Babylonian captivity. But we can say from our understanding of the New Testament and from those who wrote the New Testament, who wrote God-breathed Scripture, that by the time we get into Isaiah chapter 52, we’re right in the midst of Isaiah’s description of the ministry of God’s servant who will bring salvation.

And so it’s only reasonable for us to interpret Isaiah 52, where it speaks of Zion, Jerusalem, the holy city—that he’s speaking of the church. He may not have been aware of it. The Apostle Peter in First Peter tells us that they looked into the things they wrote *trying* to understand them, and realize that they weren’t writing for themselves. They were writing for our benefit. These things were written for our benefit. The Lord’s coming salvation is a salvation that’s going to come through the Lord Jesus Christ. And that which Scripture calls “Zion” is the church, it’s the body of Christ, it’s the place where the saints dwell in the presence of Christ, who sprinkled His own blood as the mediator of our new covenant.

So God says to His people in Isaiah 52, if you want to turn back there, “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.” Put on your beautiful garments. And once again, I remind you of the earlier reading we took from the book of Zechariah chapter 3, verses 1 to 5. What was the picture? Joshua, the High Priest, covered in filthy garments. And we’re told in that vision that those filthy garments are the iniquity that separates him from God. They’re the iniquity that gives Satan power over him. And the vision in Zechariah, God says, “I will take away the filth. I will take away those filthy garments. I will clothe you in beautiful clothing. I will clothe you in the proper clothing of a High Priest.”

My friends, “put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the holy city.” Remember in the book of Revelation, the city that descends from heaven, the holy city, which in John’s vision is an enormous cube about 1,800 kilometers square-cubed. And it’s hard for us to get our idea around how big that is. But if the corner of the cube was here, the farthest west corner just due west from me would land somewhere about two-thirds of the way across the Nullarbor Plain. And then the next corner, if you went north from that point, would be somewhere out in the desert to the northwest of Alice Springs. And then the next corner coming back to the coast, on the east

coast, would be somewhere north of Brisbane. And then it's 1,800 kilometers high, and we can't even imagine something that high. In John's vision, this holy city is simply stupendous—ridiculously stupendous.

But in the book of Revelation, what does he say about this holy city? He says it's adorned as a bride. I mean, you can't get your mind around the idea of a vision of a 1,800-kilometer cubed city. Well then you ask yourself the question, How could a 1,800-kilometer cubed city be adorned as a bride?

Well, what's the whole aim of a bride on her wedding day? What does she want to be? Beautiful. She wants to be beautiful. She wants to be wearing the best things that she can possibly wear. She wants to be clothed in beauty. Her hope is that as she enters the church, everyone looks at her and—"Oh, wow! Never realized—never realized that girl was that beautiful!" And God says to Jerusalem, "Put on your beautiful garments." So He's speaking to the church: "Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the holy city." Zion is being cleansed. The filthy clothing has been taken away. The beautiful clothing has been given.

What else do we notice about Zion? Well look what it says: "For there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean." That's the last line of verse 1, Isaiah 52 verse 1. "For there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean."

Now once again, to Isaiah, to the people of his time, the uncircumcised and the unclean is a simple and clear reference to anyone who's not a Jew. It's to anyone who does not have lineage that traces back to Abraham. It's to anyone that is not of the people of Abraham. They're not in the old covenant nation.

But we've got to interpret using all of Scripture, and everything that has been revealed to us. Circumcision—the picture of circumcision, when you look at Scripture from start to finish, is somewhat different to the way that a Jew looked upon circumcision. As far as a Jew was concerned, circumcision was their guarantee of their connection with Abraham. Circumcision was just about the most important thing that could be done to a baby boy. That's why they often called people who were not circumcised simply "the uncircumcised"—the uncircumcised. That's how important it was to them.

You know, if we say "the uneducated," we're talking about someone who can't read. The unclean, someone who doesn't have enough showers, well they say, "the uncircumcised" and "the unclean." And the whole point of uncircumcision has always been, in all of Scripture, more than simply just a tribal marker of a certain group of people who get to claim or trace their ancestry back to one certain important man. And this is the next thing that we need to sort of trace our way through in Scripture.

So I want you to start at Deuteronomy chapter 10, and we'll read from verse 12. Now this is Moses speaking. These are his departing sermons to the people of Israel before he was taken from them, before he died and Joshua becomes the leader of the nation. In Deuteronomy chapter 10, Moses restates the law—that's why it's called Deuteronomy, which simply means "second law," or "second giving of the law"—but he also expands on a number of points. Deuteronomy 10, starting at verse 12:

“¹² ‘And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? ¹⁴ Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. ¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. ¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. ¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.’”

Think about what Moses has said there, verse 16. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.” What was circumcision? Circumcision was cutting away the foreskin of the male sexual organ. That was what was considered to be the covenant sign for the people of Israel, and Moses says to the people of Israel, “You know, it’s not enough. That’s not enough. That was an act in obedience to the law that God has given, but that simple mark in the flesh, in the outward flesh, is not enough.” Verse 16: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.”

The sign of circumcision was meant to point to something deeper, the same as the sign of baptism is always meant to point to something deeper. Baptism doesn’t save anybody, but those who are saved get great benefit from being baptized, because it’s an act that’s committed in obedience to the will of God. God commands that Christians be baptized.

Well circumcision was similar. The required circumcision that actually had a person in the right relationship with God was the circumcision of the foreskin of the heart. “And be no longer stubborn”—in other words, true worship. Stubborn, stiff-necked, hard-hearted, rebellious people are not circumcised of the heart. They may have the outward sign of circumcision in the flesh, but they don’t have the heart that God requires of them. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.”

Stay in the book of Deuteronomy and move forward to Deuteronomy chapter 30, and we’ll read verses 1 to 6. Now Moses has outlined to the people the blessings and the curses that will come upon them, and the curses especially for disobedience. Deuteronomy 30, verse 1:

“¹ ‘And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you.’” Now stop and just think. What’s the book of Isaiah about? The people of Judah are being judged for their disobedience, and being driven away from the promised land into Babylon. Okay, verse 2: “‘and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul,³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.’”

So what's Moses said? He said, Through disobedience, the nation will be taken into captivity. In captivity, the nation will remember the Lord their God and seek to be returned. The Lord will draw them back into His presence, and the Lord will circumcise their heart. He will give them a changed and transformed heart.

Now in the light of Deuteronomy, let's try and interpret what is being told to us here in Isaiah 52: "O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean." What's Isaiah doing? He's saying, Here's the fulfillment. Moses spoke of this. In Deuteronomy chapter 30, Moses spoke of this. The people would be called back, and no more would the uncircumcised and the unclean come into Jerusalem.

Once again, that's the Old Testament look. That's the Old Testament promise concerning circumcision of the heart. But we have our New Testaments, and our New Testaments tell us more about this. So in your New Testaments, I want you to turn to the book of Galatians chapter 5. First of all, in Galatians chapter 5, Paul is speaking to a church that's been led astray into legalism by people who are called the Judaizers, who have been preaching to Christians who are otherwise, let's say happily saved, that if you're not circumcised, if you don't become a Jew first, you're not truly a Christian.

Galatians 5, verse 1: "¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ²Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you." So let's stop. Paul is not saying that if you've been circumcised, you're not a Christian, okay? Many people in this day and age are circumcised. Their parents believe for medical reasons that it is of benefit to their children. They're not having their males circumcised to circumcise them into old covenant obligations; it's a medical decision. That's not what Paul's speaking of. Paul's speaking of Christians who have been tempted to submit to Jewish law, as though the work of Christ were not enough to complete their salvation, as though something had to be added to what Jesus has done.

Looking at verse 3: "³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

So what do we get from this part of the writings of the Apostle Paul? Salvation is in no way dependent upon circumcision. It's got nothing to do with whether or not you're actually physically circumcised. It's got nothing to do with whether or not you're actually brought into the old covenant Jewish nation, and from there you become a Christian.

Let's keep looking at what Paul's got to say. I want us to turn to the book of Philippians chapter 3. Start at verse 1 again. This time we'll just read the first three verses. Philippians 3:1: "¹Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

Now he's writing to the Philippians. The Philippian church is not a Jewish church or a church filled with Jewish converts, it's a Gentile church. And what does Paul say to them? "We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

What would that circumcision be? It's the circumcision of the heart, which Moses spoke of back in Deuteronomy chapter 30, which Moses spoke of back in Deuteronomy chapter 10—the circumcision that transforms the heart and takes away the stubbornness and the wickedness that's to be found in the human heart. And those who have that circumcision, they are the true circumcision. They are the ones who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.

Let's have a look at another one. I want you to go to the book of Colossians, chapter 2. We'll start reading at verse 8: "⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Now let's look at that and slow it down, and just try and make it clear. Verse 11: "In him." In whom? Christ, the one in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily. "In him," verse 11, "also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands." A circumcision made without hands. What's he speaking of? Once again, go back into your Old Testament, and you go back to the book of Deuteronomy, and Moses spoke of the necessity of what? The circumcision of the heart. Who is the true circumcision? The true circumcision are those who worship in Christ Jesus and put no trust in the flesh. My friends, we—we Christians—we're the circumcision.

Let's keep reading: "by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ." Now Paul here does an interesting thing. Just keep reading: "¹²having been buried with him in baptism." Do you see what Paul has done? Paul is basically saying that the circumcision of Christ was His death. "By putting off the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism." Paul is saying that Christ dying is our circumcision, that the circumcision of Christ was Him being put to death upon the cross, and that we have been buried with Christ, who was put to death on the cross.

We are in Christ. That which has happened to Christ is counted as having happened to us. Therefore, we are the true circumcision, because our circumcision is the death of Jesus Christ. Notice it's buried with Him in baptism—"having been buried with him in baptism"—that symbol of being washed, being cleansed, and being hidden in Christ. And there, in Christ, you receive the true circumcision, and you become part of the people of God.

How do we interpret, then, "put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean"? No one enters into heavenly Zion, apart from those who worship in Christ. No one is saved, apart from those who are in Christ. No one is counted as clean, apart from those who are in Christ. No one is part of the covenant, apart from those who are in Christ. All who are outside of Christ are what Scripture now calls the uncircumcised. And it's not a physical thing. It's the circumcision of the heart.

And what is this purified Jerusalem, this purified Zion? It's the believers, and only the believers. We are the city of God. It doesn't look like much here in Cooma at the moment, does it? But we can't see the church as it appears in history, thousand upon thousand, million upon million of people saved through grace, saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't see the church for what it is from our point of view. We're stuck here in time, we're finite people, we see what goes on around us. My friends, as the author of Hebrews says, We've come to the heavenly city. We've come to the heavenly Jerusalem. We're dwelling even now in the presence of God. Even now, we are Christ's people living in the very presence of God.

Turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 21. After the vision of the new Jerusalem that John received, that stupendously enormous city adorned as a bride, move down to verse 22. ²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

What does John say? But nothing unclean will ever enter into this heavenly Jerusalem. Nothing, "nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." Now look back again in Isaiah chapter 52: "For there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean."

My friends, Jerusalem was rebuilt. It was repopulated by the Jews. They did come back out of their Babylonian captivity, or at least a remnant of them did. They did build a temple. But there was nothing spectacular about rebuilt Jerusalem. These incredible promises of being clean, being beautiful, being circumcised in heart—they were never fulfilled in the rebuilt Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, between the return of captivity and the coming of our Lord, was nothing more or less than a pointer into the New Testament promises. It had to be there, and the temple had to be there, for Scripture tells us that the Lord Himself would enter His temple. And Jesus did. And He cleansed the temple. And then remember in the gospel of John that Jesus speaks of His body being the temple. He says, destroy His temple and in three days "I will raise it up," speaking of Himself, John tells us. He makes sure we absolutely understand it. He was speaking of Himself. The temple is Christ Himself.

And to be of those who are dressed in beautiful garments, clean garments, garments not stained with sin, to be counted as those who are the circumcised, those who are the clean, you have to be in Christ. You must be in Christ. You must have put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our works can't do it. Our good works don't get us there. Nothing gets us there but grace—the grace of God, through faith in Christ. God is gracious.

My friends, if you want to be a member of that eternal heavenly city, if you want to be counted as one who was born there, you have to be born again in Christ. You have to be born into Christ. You have to be born into the church. And in that being born, you are given the gift of God, which is a circumcised heart.

Remember in Jeremiah chapter 31, where Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant blessing that's to come upon the people of God, God says that He will write His law on, or in, the hearts of His people. And there's the problem, isn't it? The law that Moses was giving in Deuteronomy, it was an external law. It was a law out there, it was a law over your head, it was a law that you had to obey, or at least strive to obey, but it was a law that did not change the heart.

But Jeremiah says, in the coming times, the law will be written in the heart of the people of God. And I think that we can safely say that that law being written in your heart means to be given a circumcised heart—the very thing which Moses told the people of Israel they need, we all need, we must have. If we don't have it, we don't have Christ, and we don't have eternal life, and we don't have hope.

Let's quickly look now at verse 2 of Isaiah 52. "Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion." You see what God says: "I've saved you. Get up out of the dirt. I've saved you. Be seated, be seated! You no longer work for your salvation. You work for me. You obey me. You do as I command you to do. But works are not your salvation. Be seated, O Jerusalem. Rest! Rest!"

Now understand, we're resting in Christ. The Christian's assurance, the Christian's feast, the Christian's rest is because we know that the works that are required have been done by the Lord Jesus Christ. "Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion." Break free from slavery to sin. Break free from captivity and bondage.

What does Scripture tell us? What's the greatest slavery that mankind has ever been under? And it's not the slavery of one person owning another person, as repugnant as that can be seen in many people's eyes. That's not the great slavery of Scripture. The great slavery of Scripture is the slavery to sin: sin that dominates us; sin that runs our lives; sin that's like a yoke upon our neck; sin that weighs us down, that we don't break from in our own strength.

Yet when God has given you a circumcised heart, God can say to you, "Break the bonds. Break the bonds of sin. I have empowered you. I have enabled you. Step away, get out of that wickedness. You are my child. I've clothed you in beautiful garments. Sin no longer has power over you, O captive daughter of Zion." O captive daughter of Zion. I don't have time now to chase this out through Scripture, but the daughters of Zion are the believers, the faithful ones. If we were to get into the Psalms and other places in Scripture, we'd find the daughters of Zion are the believers. They're the faithful ones. They're the ones who rejoice in the presence of God.

God says to those who have been transformed by the power of His Spirit, through the work of His servant, "Loose the bonds from your neck. Break free from the sin that enslaves you. It no longer has power over you." Remember that Satan stood and accused Joshua, and God said, "Clean him. Give him nothing to accuse over. Clean him. He's clean in my eyes, he's clothed in the clothing that I have given you."

And that's God's promise to all who will repent and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Come into Zion. Come into that heavenly city." We come into it now, in this present age. The new creation has broken into the old creation. Once again, I say we look around, and it doesn't

seem that spectacular and it doesn't seem that wonderful. But the truth is, it's amazing. It's truly amazing. It's more than any of us can ever hope to appreciate or understand.

My friends, this is freedom from the slavery to sin—you know, that burden which says you must go to hell and there burn for all of eternity, that burden which separates a person from the love of God. God hates sin. Evil may not dwell with Him, Psalm 5. He abhors the evildoer. God hates sin, and hates those who love their sin. And God's promise is, "Be loosed from your bonds. Be free. Fight the battle. Have your heart circumcised. Have your desires changed. Have the law of God written upon your heart. Have life in Christ, rather than death in the wickedness of this world.

"Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city." God speaks to His people. God promises life. God promises that eternal life is there to be had through the work of His servant. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do once again praise you and thank you for all the good that you do for us, your people. We thank you and praise you that all of us who have been born again in Christ can boast in the Lord our God, that we know you, that we understand your righteousness, that you indeed have made us righteous in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you have given us the promise of eternal life in the heavenly city, Father in heaven, in the very presence of the Lamb. Lord our God, I pray you would help us to understand these things. Help us to worship you truly. Help us to love you for all the good that you have done for us. Help us to rejoice in you. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.