

“WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS?”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

December 25, 2021, 10:00 AM

Text for the Sermon: Isaiah 12:1-6

Isaiah 12:1

This advent we spent time in the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah 6-11. For four weeks now we have been caught up in Isaiah’s great prophetic vision of God’s redemptive purposes in history.

Chapter 6 gave us that glorious temple vision of the Messiah and Isaiah’s heartfelt cry of repentance followed by his atonement with coals taken from the fire on the altar.

We heard the incredible promise in chapter 7 of a virgin giving birth to a child called Immanuel. Then in chapter 9 another prophecy of a child being given and a son being born. Finally, last week in chapter 11 we heard of a shoot coming out of the stump of Jesse bearing great fruit.

When you consider the condition of the heart of Israel, cold, hard, rebellious, resistant, and you see the righteous wrath of God, and the judgment that came through the armies of Assyria, you can’t help but be stunned by these prophetic promises of God.

Have you ever made a mess of something in your life and then by the grace of God it not only works out, but works out better than before? Have you ever deserved nothing and then receive more than you could ever hope or imagine?

How do you respond in those situations? What do you say to those things.

Isaiah 12 is the response. It’s a song of thanksgiving, a kind of thank you note written 7 centuries before the gift is given. If I wrote you a thank you note thanking you for the gift of a thousand dollars you are going to give to me two years from now, you would consider that rather presumptuous. So why isn’t it presumptuous for Isaiah?

For Isaiah the prophetic promises of God are so sure and certain Isaiah can write the ***thank you note*** 700 years before hand and send it. This is Isaiah putting words in our mouth, telling us ***then*** what we would say ***now***. In a sense we are listening to our own voices from 27 centuries ago.

There is a clear distinct structure to Chapter 12 and I had it printed in our bulletin in a way that makes it clear. There are two songs of praise and they both begin and end in the same way.

Remember all those “ands” in chapter 11. Isaiah 12 flows out of Isaiah 11 and begins with “and.” And the words “in that day” point to the root of Jesse, the Messiah, to today.

Verses 1-2 the “you” is singular, this is what each of us individually says. Verses 4-5 the “you” is plural, what we all corporately say.

Verses 3 and 6 are Isaiah’s prophetic commands. So these are two songs, two praises, each followed by two prophetic commands to have joy, in that day you will have joy.

Isaiah 12 is a celebration of the Messiah’s kingdom on earth and this is what those who are redeemed by God sing about.

A river of wickedness as flowed from human hearts for thousands of years. We have sinned, we have brought down judgment and curses on ourselves. We have contributed nothing to our salvation, but God by His saving grace sent the only possible remedy, a Messiah, an Anointed One, who is Christ the Lord, God with us, who will save us from our sins.

How could such a holy God give to such unholy and wicked people such a beautiful Savior?

What shall we say to these things? How do we respond? “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Let’s consider Isaiah’s words and so we can make them our own thank you note.

Isaiah 12:1-2, each of you will say in that day.

Isaiah says God’s anger has turned away. Where did it go? God’s anger doesn’t just fade away, dissolve, heal over time. No, God’s wrath is just and holy and must be poured out on sin. So the only way for it to turn and go away is for it to be satisfied.

This is a clear picture of the atoning work of Christ who takes away the righteous, justified, deserved wrath of God. Jesus comes to save us sinners from death and judgment.

When you deserve anger and punishment, but you get grace and comfort, it is an amazing experience. I have experienced being pulled over for going too fast and been let go with a warning. That experience as you drive away knowing that you should have received at least a hundred dollar ticket, and you are free, no ticket, that's a glimpse of grace.

Those scenes in the great movie Les Miserable, when Jean Val Jean should have been punished or killed, and he is free, those are powerful moments of grace.

On this day, we worship God and give thanks, for the anger and just wrath of our holy God, has turned away.

Verse 2 starts with that emphatic exclamation, ***Behold!*** This word is meant to give us a sense of shock, surprise. Can you believe this?

Wonder of all wonders, God used to be our enemy, but He no longer is. I have had friends turn into enemies, but I don't know of an enemy who has become a friend.

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

This is no small thing. God Himself has become and is now my salvation, my strength, my song, and for that reason He has all my trust. For this reason Isaiah prophecies to us in verse 3.

Isaiah 12:3, with joy draw water from the wells of salvation.

What are these wells of salvation? What does this mean?

Remember when I said how hard it is to preach these OT prophecies because there are so few points of contact for us. We have no experiences of invading armies, of being held hostage or in bondage, or dividing the spoils of victory, or even of darkness in our well lit world.

We don't have wells, we just turn on the tap and never think a thing of it. Have we ever been truly thirsty, parched? We haven't walked miles under the middle Eastern sun to get water and then experience the incredible refreshment of those cool waters on our parched lips and throat.

There are very few things more necessary to life than water, so also there is no scarcity or lack more profound or distressing. How many of you have already had a drink of water today? Probably all of us. All of us drink water every day, and several times a day.

Water is absolutely essential to life, so it is often used as a symbol of life-giving salvation. God is the source of living water and He invites us to come and drink.

Psalm 63:1-3 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

John 4:13-14 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Jesus is the well, He wants us to drink from His wells of salvation every day and several times a day. This is like preaching the Gospel to yourself every day. To drink from the wells of salvation is not just past tense, one and done. This is not just conversion, this is life-giving, life-sustaining water. Jesus has been our salvation and will never cease being our salvation.

It is the desire of God that we rejoice in Him, find our joy in Him, be satisfied in Him. This is why Jesus came, that we might have fulness of joy, thirst-quenching joy.

Isaiah 12:4-5, make known His deeds for He has done gloriously.

The focus shifts here. Before the “you” was singular, individual. The thanks was for salvation. Here the “you” is plural, the focus is now outward.

Make known His deeds. What deeds? God’s record of redemptive history from beginning to end. Today we can speak of Jesus’ incarnation, taking on our flesh, and Jesus’ suffering and dying for us, for His satisfying and appeasing the Father’s righteous and justified wrath against us, for His death-defying and sin-destroying resurrection, for His promised return in glory.

Think about all the things associated with the celebration of Christ’s incarnation that you enjoy, the music and singing, the sights and sounds, the special treats and feasts, the time with family and friends, the giving and receiving of gifts, the joy and peace, the hope and love.

Now think about those who experience none of this, how really do dwell in darkness. Our hearts should reach out in love and compassion to invite them to come and drink from the wells of salvation found in our Savior. The whole world has stopped for this day, but many don’t know why. Our celebration of Christmas should be so different from the world that their thirsty souls would want to come and drink what we have.

Isaiah 12:6, shout and sing for joy for God is in our midst.

This is another prophetic command, an emphatic call to shout and sing for joy.

We should be beside ourself with joy. Joy greater than what you feel as you open your best present ever. Joy greater than having all my boys and their families gathered in our home a week from today.

And why should we be over-the-top giddy with joy? Because the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel is in our very midst. In His presence is the fulness of all joy. Immanuel, God with us.

Think back to the great book of Exodus in the OT and the thrilling story of Israel's exodus out of bondage in Egypt and wilderness wanderings to the Promised Land. What would you pick out of that story as the highlight, the greatest moment, the highpoint of Israel's experience?

Crossing the Red Sea and the armies of Egypt destroyed.
Encountering the covenant making God at the holy mountain of Sinai.
The miraculous provision of manna from the sky and water out of rock.

There is something far greater than all of that. The real climactic moment is when God says to Moses:

Exodus 25:8 Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

Exodus 40:34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

This is the ultimate cause for joy. Not the miracles, not the deliverance and grace. But when God comes down and puts His tent with our tents and dwells with us.

This should knock our socks off, this should give us goosebumps, this should make us sing and dance. "Pleased as man with men to dwell." God is obsessed with dwelling with us.

This should elicit the same joy a child feels when grandpa and grandma come for a visit, when the kids come home for Christmas, a son returns from war.

Isaiah 12:6 Shout, and sing for *joy*, O inhabitant of Zion, for *great* in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 14:23 Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Now I confess to you I don't always think and feel this way. I confess to often coming to worship and thinking this is normal, routine, just something we Christians do every week. I forget to remember God truly is in this place and anything can happen here, because His presence makes this gathering supernatural.

I sometimes forget to remember there is power here, holiness dwelling in our midst. I forget to remember how incredible a privilege it is to live on a visited planet and to be a visited people and to have a God who wants to put His tent next to ours. I forget God is great in our midst. Glory to God for this day to remind the world of Immanuel.

Conclusion and application.

What shall we say to all these things?

Let our hearts and mouths be filled with praise and thanksgiving for God's amazing grace. Let us worship Him not just when we are gathered but when we give and receive gifts, when we feast and fellowship together.

Let us live every moment in the light of His glory and grace, mindful of how great a salvation we have received, and how great in our midst is our Messiah, who is our salvation.

Now is the time to go to our houses for feasting. Go and enjoy and celebrate your Savior's birth. For all who believe you have a right to be very happy, He gave you the right to be the children of God and that is cause for rejoicing. Go and feast and drink from the wells of your salvation.

Let your faith give you great joy, for to us a child has been born, a Son has been given and He is Christ the Lord and we have beheld His glory. Glory to God and Amen.

Prayer: Holy Father of all joy, thank you for this day. Thank you for thinking of this day before the beginning of time. We can scarcely imagine how you stood on the threshold of heaven and said good-bye to your only Son to be born in a manger. Thank you for the indescribable gift of the incarnation of your Son. Thank you for making it possible for God and sinners to be reconciled. Thank you that by His birth we no more may die. May those who have been spectators stop holding back, and surrender to the truth and power of your redemption. All glory and praise belongs to you. We love you Lord Jesus and we pray in your name. Amen.