

The Lord Loves Justice

Bible Background • ISAIAH 61:8—62:12

Printed Text • ISAIAH 61:8–11; 62:2–4 | Devotional Reading • ISAIAH 42:1–9

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EXPLAIN** the hope of vindication for the righteous and faithful, **DESIRE** salvation and restoration for God’s people, and **COMMIT** to making just decisions in everyday life.

In Focus

It was the thirty-fifth high school reunion for West Side High School’s class of 1967. Everyone was excited and ready to have a good time. Jacqui and Darrell were the organizers.

As everyone gathered to make a toast to their present and future, Darrell asked if they could have a moment of silence and remember the two brothers, Reginald and Stephen Phillips. Everyone remembered how kind they were back in their high school days. After graduation, the brothers established themselves as outstanding men in the community, in their families, and in the teen club they started. As they were walking down the street just a few months ago, a car rode past them, and shots were fired. Later, it was revealed the brothers were not even the intended targets.

After a moment of silence, Jacqui and Darrell decided to make their announcements. They shared with everyone that a memorial plaque honoring Stephen and Reginald would be placed in the hallway near the principal’s office and a program to combat bullying and promote economic development for the high school and the community would start in the fall, and everyone was invited to participate.

In today’s lesson, we learn about God’s promise to honor His people, even after hardship. How have you seen God bestow honor on His children in this world?

Keep in Mind

“For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them” (Isaiah 61:8, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 61:8** For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

62:2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.

3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

The People, Places, and Times

Names. In Bible times, names held meaning for their bearers. They often reflected a parent's hope for their child's life or the parent's concerns at their child's birth. Rachel knew she would die in childbirth and wanted to name her son Ben-oni, "son of my sorrow." Jacob, however, saw hope in his favorite wife's son and named him Benjamin, "son of my right hand" (Genesis 35:18). Sometimes names are foretold for children whom God

has already chosen to do His work (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:13). Renaming, especially when the new name is from God, expresses a kind of rebirth into a new person. Abram, "great father," became Abraham, "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). Jacob, "supplanter," became Israel, "wrestles with God" (Genesis 32:26–29). Jesus changed Simon, "he has heard," to Peter, "rock," to reflect his character and his place in the church (Matthew 16:18). Saul, "asked for" in Hebrew, began to go by Paul, "small," the most similar sounding Latin name, to reflect his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 13:9).

Background

The prophet Isaiah articulates a message about justice from an unlikely place—in the midst of Babylonian captivity. In that place, God has seemingly forsaken the people of Israel and has used a more corrupt nation to punish God's own people for their corruption. This timeless spirit and commitment to calling out injustice becomes immortalized in the words of Isaiah 61:1–4, the very words that Luke records Jesus using as the text for his initial sermon in Luke 4. This illustrates that God's love affair with justice transcends time, space, and communities. Even people who find themselves in the diaspora can comfort themselves in knowing that God is still in love with justice and that God is committed to righting the wrongs that have been inflicted upon them.

How can we think about God's commitment to justice in diaspora in line with our own history?

At-A-Glance

1. Divine Adoration for Justice (Isaiah 61:8–9)
2. Divine Attire of Justice (vv. 10–11)
3. Divine Attraction to Justice (62:2–4)

In Depth

1. Divine Adoration for Justice (Isaiah 61:8–9)

Our text follows the form of much Hebrew poetry where the lines of couplets communicate similar ideas but with different nuances. In verse 8, the Lord declares that He loves justice. Then for further clarification, the next line puts forward the Lord's declaration of His hatred for robbery and wrongdoing. In both lines, the subject is the same—the Lord. The verbs are antonyms, and thus the predicates are polar opposites. If justice is on one side, then robbery and wrongdoing are on the other side. The two are incompatible. They warrant opposing responses from the Lord. However, the focus of verses 8 and 9 are not on the Lord's hatred; rather, they center on the Lord's love for those who have been mistreated and suffer injustice. These verses are for those on the margins of empire (in this case the Babylonian Empire) and for those who feel that God has forgotten them because it seems like evil has won the day. To those people, the Lord writes a love letter to justice about them and shares how He will settle the accounts, because His covenant is everlasting, and His blessings can relocate them from a place of shame to a place of prominence.

What would God's love letter about justice say to our society today?

2. Divine Attire of Justice (vv. 10–11)

Verse 10 marks a change in speaker. It moves from the Lord's speech to the Lord's servant, Israel, speaking about a celebration. This is not an ordinary occasion. It is at the level of wedding ceremony significance. Therefore, similar to how the bride and bridegroom put on their best outfits, this celebration and rejoicing demand a wardrobe change. This type of formal attire is what the Lord provides for God's people Israel through a robe of justice. The Lord also provides garments of salvation. It is important

to remember that salvation in the Hebrew Bible has a wide meaning that includes "to rescue." This shade of meaning is helpful in this passage because it depicts how the Lord is going to take God's people who have been treated as insignificant and stripped of their dignity and envelop them in garments of rescue. Their very clothes will make them witnesses to all other people that the Lord sides with the vulnerable and exploited.

We should be keen to observe the oppression and nakedness that the Lord has had to clothe in our communities. In considering African Americans, who have been historically dispossessed in the U.S., how significant is it for us to recognize that God has provided a possession of justice as clothes?

3. Divine Attraction to Justice (62:2–4)

These verses depict how the Lord is drawn to his people in spite of their oppressed status and in spite of how the forces in power have rendered them as forsaken. The prophet's zeal will not allow him to remain silent, and he is certain that the Lord will liberate in such a dynamic way that every group of people in the world will be dazzled by the Lord's commitment to justice. Israel will arise as crown jewels. Such a significant transformation is marked by a name change. Israel will no longer be called Forsaken or Desolate. Instead the Lord will give the nation names that only the Lord can give. They may not look like a name in English but they are one word in Hebrew. One of the names is "My Delight Is in Her." This is a powerful message for those who can only see destruction around them and for those who struggle to see pleasantness in themselves or in their tragic situations. The Lord wants those folks to know that they are not forgotten and that His delight is in them.

For people who have been systematically reminded that their lives don't matter, how significant is a message that declares that they are not forsaken and that God delights in them?

Search the Scriptures

1. How is the Lord's love for justice discussed? What is it opposed to? What type of commitment does it entail? Who sees this love?

2. For those who are in situations that seem impossible and face obstacles that appear insurmountable, what are the reasons to rejoice in the Lord? What is the role of the future tense in verses 10–11?

3. What does Isaiah 62:1–4 teach us about the power of naming? Whom should we allow to name us? What types of names should we accept?

Discuss the Meaning

The Lord has a special affinity for justice, and God pays special attention to those who are on the underside of oppressive forces. The Lord is committed to rescuing God's people, not primarily because they are chosen, but because the Lord takes up for those who are robbed and mistreated. The Lord is a fan of the underdog, and those connected to the Lord cannot remain silent when they see others victimized. Not only should the Lord's eyes see the vulnerable, so should those of us who profess to have a relationship with the Lord. If we truly love the Lord, then we should love what the Lord loves, and the Lord loves justice. Whose side do we need to take today to be on the same side as the Lord?

Liberating Lesson

Many leading Black studies thinkers discuss the forced transportation of African bodies around the globe as the diaspora. This term originally applied to the people of Judah in

passages like our focus text. Now it has been appropriated to think about the experience of Africans around the world that correlates to the experiences of the people of Judah. Bodies were forcibly moved by imperial powers. Those powers attempted to destroy the culture of the people whom they stole. The stolen people had to create a new identity in spaces where people actively despised them. God reaffirms His unending love for those who were forced into slavery. God reminds them that their name is not what their oppressors call them. Their land is not barren like the oppressors call it. Their culture is not savage like the oppressors label it. Rather, they are the beloved, and they are the ones in whom God takes delight. To God, the wretched of the earth, the dispossessed, and people who are Black are beautiful. In the sight of the Lord, Black lives matter. Their name is "Delightful."

Application for Activation

Often it is easy to become cynical when we look at the affairs of the world. As African Americans, it is difficult to observe the progress that we have made without becoming discouraged by looking at how far we have to go. However, we are not called to solve all of the problems that face our community and our world. We are called to fall in love with justice like God has. By falling in love with justice, we are to keep one eye on the big picture while focusing our other eye on ways that we can remind individuals and communities that they are not forsaken by God. We may not be able to change all of the educational inequality, but we can mentor one student who feels forgotten. We may not be able to undo mass incarceration, but we can vote and rally around people who prioritize prison divestment and critical rethinking of incarceration. We may not be able to transform corrupt capitalism, but we can be fair to those whom we employ and be generous to servers. We may not be able to transform the

perception of African Americans in the United States, but we can prevent ourselves from internalizing toxic images. Even though living in the diaspora can make us feel naked, God clothes His people with luxurious garments of justice and salvation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 61:8–11; 62:2–4

Isaiah 59 portrays the deplorable and gloomy condition of the nation of Israel as a result of their sin and rejection of the Lord their God. The chapter paints a picture of total collapse in their relationship with God. Their sin, the prophet laments, has separated them from the Lord, and consequently, the Lord has turned His back on them (vv. 1–2). They are left in utter darkness, figuratively speaking, without hope of deliverance from their enemies. The enemies are being used by God as instruments

for discipline; they had no mercy on them; they denied them justice (vv. 9–15). In the midst of this gloomy situation, there comes a ray of hope to Zion; she is promised justice, deliverance, and a Redeemer. The chapter concludes with a climax: “And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 59:20).

The next three chapters of Isaiah (60–62) follow up the announcement and give an optimistic detailed description of the coming Redeemer and His work for God’s people. They record promises of great things that will come to Zion and the joy that will follow when the promises are fulfilled. In these chapters are a number of themes, such as righteousness, salvation, joy, and justice. In chapter 60, the Redeemer will be the Light that will lighten and draw all nations; Zion would be the object of the nations’ blessings and service, no longer in servitude of the nation. Chapter 61 begins with the description of the Messiah and His mission of the good news of salvation to God’s people. We learn that the Messiah, endowed with the “Spirit of the Lord GOD” will bring physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, deliverance, and comfort to God’s people (vv. 1–3); this was fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Luke 4:18–21). Verses 4–7 speak about the change that will come to Zion—Jerusalem will be rebuilt, the nations will serve them, and their former glory will be restored.

8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

In the following verses, the Lord gives the reason for changing their situation. The statement, “For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering” describes God’s character, who He is. He is a fair and just God. The Hebrew word translated “judgment”

is *mishpat* (**meesh-POT**); it is also rendered as “justice.” Often justice is used synonymously with “righteousness” (Heb. *tsedaqah*, **tseh-daw-KAW**), and the words are often used in a parallel structure (Isaiah 1:21, 27). So God is both just and righteous in judgment. A number of suggestions have been made for the interpretation of the phrase “robbery for burnt offering.” It appears that the phrase refers to the improper manner in which such offerings were made: people stole an animal and then used that dishonest gain as an offering to God. It refers to Israel’s past sin and hypocritical sacrifice that resulted in their long captivity.

However, in context, this doesn’t seem to be the case. The idea here is that God hates “robbery and wrongdoing” (NLT). The word here “robbery” is the Hebrew *gazel* (**gaw-ZALE**), which also refers to plunder or things taken away by violence. This is in particular reference to what the Babylonians did to Judah and the surrounding nations. Robbery through plunder is paired with the Hebrew word *’olah* (**oh-LAW**), which is very often translated “burnt offering,” from the root *’alah* meaning “to lift up.” However, the word *’olah* can also come from the root word *’owal*, in which case it means “evil deeds, immorality, wickedness.” Therefore, the sentence “For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering” can be rendered better as “For I the Lord love justice, I hate plunder and evil.” Rather than to blame Israel for hypocritical sacrifices, God says this to aver the injustice against the Babylonians.

Furthermore, the Lord promises, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” The word “covenant” comes from the Hebrew *berit* (**beh-REET**), with the idea of making a pledge between two or more peoples, such as between nations. In certain cultures, a treaty was consummated by killing an animal or by making a small cut on the finger of each of the parties and leaking one another’s blood. Hence

the Hebrew phrase can literally be translated as “cutting a covenant.” A covenant is simply a legally binding agreement or contract between two parties; it typically includes certain expectations from all parties concerned and the benefits to be enjoyed by each party. In the divine covenant, God always takes the initiative for the benefit of His people.

When God promises to make an “everlasting covenant” here, He is indeed renewing an already existing covenant relationship with His people. This “everlasting covenant” is also described in Jeremiah 31:31–37; it includes the blessings of the New Covenant that Jesus Christ instituted by His death (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 10:1–18).

9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

All these blessings are for posterity. As a result of these blessings and because of the eternal nature of their covenant with the Lord, Israel’s descendants will be noted by all nations. The idea here is that Israel will be a distinct nation among the nations. The sentence structure here is parallelism in which the first sentence is deliberately repeated for emphasis. The word “seed” is synonymous with “offspring,” and “Gentiles” and “the people” are synonymous. Other nations will notice the uniqueness of Israel’s descendants and will recognize Israel as the ones the Lord has blessed. They will see God’s blessing radiating around them. This divine promise to be a blessing among other nations has been part of God’s covenant with His chosen ones going all the way back to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3). This promise is not limited to Israel’s natural descendants, but to all spiritual children of Abraham—all believers in Christ—the Church.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

The Lord has been the one speaking (vv. 8–9), but now the voice changes to the first person speaking of the Lord in the third person. There is no consensus on who the speaker is here. Is it the voice of the Messiah who was the speaker in verses 1–7, or Isaiah rejoicing on behalf of the people whom God has blessed? Some suggest that it was the voice of Zion—the people of God—those whom the Lord will bless. We assume, though not with certainty, that Isaiah is speaking for Israel or Zion, God’s people. He rejoices in their relationship with Yahweh who will prove faithful and generous in His dealings with His people. The clause “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord ...” is similar to the joy expressed in Mary’s song (Luke 1:46–47), joy at the recognition of redemption coming soon.

This redemption is expressed metaphorically as ceremonial attires and ornaments. Salvation (Heb. *yeshah*, **yeh-SHA**) is referred to as the inner dress or garment, while righteousness (*tsedaqah*) represents the outer coat. While modern thought might disassociate a person’s dress or outer appearance from who they are inside, in Isaiah’s time the clothes really did make the man. One’s outer appearance was thought to reflect one’s inner being. Therefore to be clothed in salvation and righteousness was to absorb those qualities into your core self. This dressing is more of a ceremonial outfit than protective—such as a wedding ceremony. We have here a picture of a wedding party, dressed in beautiful wedding garments and decorated with costly jewels. The Bible uses the bride/bridegroom imagery again to express

God’s (or Christ) relationship with the Church (Ephesians 5:25–27, Revelation 21:2, 9).

11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Using joyous botanical and horticultural imagery, the prophet describes how righteousness and praises will suddenly emerge. Just as new leaves and flowers add new colors to the tree, and seeds emerge from the ground in springtime, so will righteousness and praise shoot up everywhere. God controls the springtime growth, and so He can control righteousness and praise as well. Notice the pairing now is righteousness (*tsedaqah*) and praise (Heb. *tehillah*, **teh-heel-LAH**). When God sows His goodness in us, we can respond in one of two ways: by reflecting His righteousness in ourselves or by offering up our praise directly to God. As with all that has been going on with Israel in this prophecy, this budding is “before all the nations.” That means righteousness will be a common thing in all the earth—not only Zion will benefit from this.

62:2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. 3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. 4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

Chapter 62 opens with the assurance of God’s determination to fulfill His promise to Zion. He reassures Jerusalem that He would never

relent until the promise of righteousness shines brightly (62:1). It should be noted that Zion and Jerusalem are used synonymously—Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion. Both are often used interchangeably to refer to Israel or Judah—God’s people. Because the righteousness and salvation will shine so brightly, it will be seen by the Gentiles and their kings—they will behold Zion’s glory. This is akin to His earlier pronouncement in the previous chapter (61:9) where “all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.” Righteousness will be so outstanding that all the Gentile nations will see and experience the glory of God radiating through Israel.

Zion will become the regalia of God. “Crown” is the Hebrew *‘atarah* (**ah-taw-RAW**), a specially decorated headpiece for royalty, and “diadem,” *tsanif* (**TSAW-neef**) is like a type of turban worn by kings—often adorned with jewels. Both words are synonymous. This is a poetic parallelism in which the second sentence emphasizes the first. The imagery sets up Israel as God’s crowning glory. They are the sign to all who see them that God is mighty, glorious, and authoritative. Oddly, though Israel is called a crown or diadem, they are still held “in the hand” of the Lord. This shows that even as the nation is made righteous, they are still protected in God’s hand. They are also not elevated above God but subject to Him.

At one time, during their exile and as a consequence of sin, Israel felt forsaken and thought their land was rendered desolate. Because of the severity of their suffering, they assumed the names “Forsaken” (49:14); God called her forsaken (60:15); howbeit it was for a short term. Now the Lord had completely altered the situation for them, as their new names show.

Israel will acquire “a new name.” Names are very important in Bible times—they often

reflect a person’s fundamental character, and renaming expresses a significant change of character or calling. Hence Abram became Abraham because he would be “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5); Jacob was given Israel (which means wrestled with God) after wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32:26—29). Jesus changed Simon to Peter (Rock) to reflect his character (Matthew 16:18), and Saul became Paul (Greek equivalent to the Hebrew Saul) to reflect his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 13:9). Israel’s new names are “Hephzibah” and “Beulah,” which mean “delight” and “husband or marry” respectively. The notion of giving Zion a new name symbolizes a new and closer intimate relationship between God and His people Israel. This promise is renewed for the Church when we have been fully transformed in heaven (Revelation 2:17; 3:12).

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Say It Correctly

Hephzibah. **HEFF**-zih-buh.
 Beulah. **BEE**-you-lah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Solomon Makes a Just
Decision
(1 Kings 3:16—28)

WEDNESDAY

The Year of Jubilee
Established
(Leviticus 25:8—17)

SATURDAY

Zion Welcomes the
Redeemed Home
(Isaiah 62:5—12)

TUESDAY

Jesus Issues His Platform
for Justice
(Luke 4:14—21)

THURSDAY

A Light to the Nations
(Isaiah 49:1—7)

SUNDAY

The Lord Brings the
People Justice
(Isaiah 61:8—11;
62:2—4)

FRIDAY

A New Vision for the People
(Isaiah 61:1—7)

Notes
