

## The Lord Blesses the Redeemed

By grace alone the Lord provides His people with forgiveness and peace. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, has died and risen again to accomplish this. God's efforts created the people who have become His Zion and Jerusalem, the people He has called out of the darkness to be His chosen holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). They are His people here in this world, and after this life is over, they will enter the new Jerusalem that awaits believers (Revelation 21:3-4). The Lord does not want the message of His grace in Christ, which created His church, to be a secret to the world. He wants all people to hear and believe the message of His love for sinners. So He will not keep silent until the righteousness that belongs to all believers shines so brightly that all the nations see it.

How does the Lord announce this? Of course, the Scriptures provide that clear announcement, but God works through His people too. Jesus told His disciples, "*You will be My witnesses,*" (Acts 1:8). So God works through the proclamation of His people. First, He gives them the power to speak of His grace, as Stephen did before the crowd that stoned him. Second, God works through their proclamation of the gospel to call others to see and believe. The entire process becomes one grand cascade - a continuous cycle. By the gospel, God empowers His people to speak and works through their message to bring others to faith. Then He empowers these new believers to speak and works through their message again to bring still others to faith. The cycle has persisted through the centuries to the present; God has not kept silent. Because the good news of God's mercy in Jesus Christ has come from the voices of God's people, His gospel continues its glorious work.

The Lord is not indifferent toward His people, God delights in His people. He has created them, protected them, and promised them wonderful blessings. Isaiah pictures God's people as a "splendid crown" and "a royal headband," (Is. 62:3). Since the Lord holds the church, pictured as this crown, in His hand, the church is His work of art - His creation, which He desires to display to the world. God works as the artist who has done everything to make His church beautiful. He invested time in fulfilling the prophecies made throughout the pages of Scripture. He has invested the holy precious blood of His one and only Son to wash away the sins of His church. He has worked through the gospel to call people and has made them His own. Now He continues to give the church the power to proclaim the sweet message of forgiveness and eternal life. God wants to display the workmanship and effort He has invested in His church.

In the history of this world, however, the church seems more desolate and deserted than glorious. Just as Isaiah's readers were directed to look ahead, so all God's people look ahead, not to a new chapter in world history and politics but to the end of the world's book and the dawn of God's glorious new Jerusalem. In this world, God's people have no lasting city, but they are looking forward to the one waiting for them (Hebrews 13:14). The church knows that this glorious city lies beyond time and space because God promised it. Here we find another of those promises. The promises give believers a taste of what awaits them. The believers trust in the grace and mercy of

God, which He shares with them through the Word. Through it, believers know of His love for them and are refreshed by it in the world, where disloyalty and desertion play so prominently. Even if it appears so, believers are not deserted now. They are in God's hands, and He promises His presence and protection. Yet they await a future time when the presence of God will be complete and immediate.

Through Isaiah, God reminds believers of the blessings to which they are heirs. While they may be called desolate and deserted here, yet God delights in them, and they have a new name. Isaiah will be more specific about that name at the end of the chapter, but here the new names are Hephzibah, meaning, "my delight is in her," and Beulah, meaning, "married." The Lord's own commentary on these names speaks of His love for His people and the joy they experience because of His grace. The metaphor is that of marriage and anticipates Paul's words in Ephesians chapter 5 about the church being the bride of Christ. God's people are married to Christ so that they may be cared for, protected, and no longer abandoned. They are subject to Him, enjoy His love, and find happiness in the relationship. God also finds joy in His church, to the point that He Himself will "rejoice over [it]," (Is. 62:5).

There is great rejoicing caused by the relationship between God and His church. God will rejoice over His people. Believers will rejoice over God's grace. Believers will even rejoice over one another, as Paul did: "*What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy,*" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). The New Testament church fulfills the promises, but the glory and joy of the eternal church in heaven surpasses anything we know today. The church now proclaims the grace of God in a world of darkness and must endure times of desolation and decay. Only in the church above will the words of God through Isaiah be fulfilled completely.