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December 19th: Isaiah 62 & Luke 19:11-28

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Zion restored and renamed. The Parable of the Minas.

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Transcript

Isaiah chapter 62. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nation shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed desolate. But you shall be called, My delight is in her, and your land married.

For the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you. And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen. All the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm, I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have laboured. But those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary. Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people.

Build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up a signal over the peoples. Behold the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth, say to the daughter of Zion, behold your salvation comes, behold his reward is with him and his recompense before him, and they shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, and you shall be called sought out, a city not forsaken. As our chapter 62 continues and concludes the chapters declaring the Lord's salvation that began in chapter 60, these chapters form the heart of the last section of the book.

In many of the proposed orderings of the structure of this section, John Goldengaze being one example, it forms a bookend with chapter 60 around chapter 61 which with the proclamation of the day of the Lord's favour lies at the centre. Chapter 61 ended with the following statement. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. Discussing those verses we considered who might be the speaker, considering the possibility held by several commentators that it might be Zion. However it seemed more likely to me that the voice is that of the servant, with whose voice the chapter also begins.

As the servant doesn't merely act on behalf of the people but can also stand for them, he might be speaking not merely as an individual minister to the people but also, particularly at the end of the chapter, as their representative. The identity of the speaker with whose words chapter 62 opens is also debated by scholars. Many are of the opinion that the Lord is the one speaking here, but others maintain that the words are those of the prophet.

The way that we identify the speaker at the end of chapter 61 will influence us at this point. Goldengate, for instance, who identifies the speaker at the end of the preceding chapter of Zion, sees the speaker here as the Lord himself. If the speaker there were the prophet, it might be reasonable to read this as a continuation or another instance of his words, a reading which Brevard Charles, for instance, advocates and which I find the more persuasive.

The servant was commissioned and empowered by the spirit to deliver the message of

the Lord's salvation, a message that would be an effectual word. And now, for the sake of Zion, he will tirelessly and ceaselessly declare the good news of her redemption until the message has taken its full effect and Zion is made radiant in the Lord's salvation. In these verses we have a confirmation and development of the promises of chapter 60, verses 1 to 3. Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

The Lord's glory would be reflected in the restored city of Zion, and people from all nations would flock to her light. Zion is compared to a crown of beauty and a royal diadem in the Lord's hand. The presence of these items in the Lord's hand is surprising, but the items themselves seem to symbolise royal authority.

Their presence in the Lord's hand might represent his attention to and care for Zion. The Lord's sovereignty and his glory would be seen in his people and in the city of Jerusalem. Zion had come to be named for its ravaged and ruined condition, forsaken and desolate.

However, now it would be renamed for the Lord's loving concern for and commitment to her. This invites comparisons with the use of the names of Hosea's children, for instance, as prophetic signs. Names that represented the sin and the fate of Israel were reversed with the expression of the Lord's renewed grace towards his rebellious people.

The comparison of the young man marrying the young woman with the sons of Zion marrying Zion is a peculiar one to our ears. Yet the imagery here is one of entering into possession of or dwelling in. The sons of Zion would enter into possession of Zion, commit themselves to her and dwell within her.

The Lord's relationship with his people as the divine bridegroom would also be expressed in his rejoicing over his restored people. Once again in verse 6 we face a difficult determination of the identity of a speaker. Scholars differ on this one too.

Some understand it to be the Lord's voice, others that it is the voice of the prophet. Consideration of the identity of the watchmen will likely play into our decision. The task that the watchmen are given is determined prayer and intercession for the good of the city.

Their task seems to differ from that of the watchmen who announced the return of the Lord to Zion earlier in the book or the prophetic watchmen in Ezekiel who were called to warn the people of approaching danger. John Oswald favours identifying these watchmen as angelic beings commissioned by the Lord to intercede for Zion. I am more inclined to see them, with Brother Charles, as helpers for the prophet and appointed by him, the

voice being that of the prophet once again.

Persistent prayer would be made for the city, confident the Lord would hear their petitions. The Lord had brought bitter judgements on the people on account of their former unfaithfulness but now all of that would be a matter of the past. The produce of the land would no longer be plundered but would be enjoyed and feasted upon in the presence of the Lord.

The chapter and the section that began with chapter 60 concludes in verses 10 to 12. Once more Jerusalem is assured of the nearness of its redemption. In chapter 57 verse 14 it was promised, And it shall be said, Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way.

Here the highway is being built up as promised. These verses also return to the language and imagery of places like chapter 40 with verse 10 of that chapter substantially repeated here. Verses 9 and 10 of chapter 40 read as follows, Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news.

Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift it up, fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him. Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. The preparation and clearing of the highway and the raising of a signal to summon the peoples from the end of the earth is a recurring motif in the book, as is the announcement of the advent of the Lord in salvation to Zion.

The Lord's coming would herald Zion's redemption and glorification. It would also transform the identity of the city, which would be renamed as a result of its deliverance and the Lord's steadfast love for her and his seeking of her out in his grace. A question to consider, how might Hosea's naming of his children and Isaiah's naming of the children earlier in this book help us better to understand the meaning of the renaming of Zion here? Luke chapter 19 verses 11 to 28.

As they heard these things he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. He said therefore, And he said to him, He said to him, And he said to those who stood by, And they said to him, But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. Jesus' parable of the miners in Luke chapter 19 is similar to the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25, albeit with some variations. Matthew's talents parable is given in

the context of the Olivet discourse, whereas this parable is seemingly delivered in the preceding week as they are nearing Jerusalem.

It is a response to the belief that the kingdom is going to appear imminently. Rather, Jesus teaches there will be an interval of time and it won't appear in the form that some expect. Jesus speaks of a nobleman who must first go away and receive a kingdom.

Matthew's parable lacks this entire subplot of the nobleman going to receive a kingdom and his relationship with his rebellious citizens. The departing nobleman would remind the Jews of Archelaus, Herod the Great's son, who had gone to Rome to petition Caesar Augustus for the kingdom of his father in 4 BC, followed by a deputation of Jews who protested against his rule. These resonances would have come to many hearers' minds.

In this parable it's minors instead of talents. Matthew emphasises difference in the initial distribution of his talents, whereas Luke has equal initial distribution but sharply different outcomes. Matthew's talents are truly immense sums of money, whereas Luke's minors are just a few months' wages.

In both cases, however, they are to be used for trade, and the importance is to be found ready for judgement, having been proved faithful in what has been committed to your charge. The time of testing will reveal the work of people. Those who are faithful are given immense rewards, in proportion to their success in managing very small sums.

This might hearken back to Jesus' teaching in the context of the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16 9-12. One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? The contrast between the small sum that is managed and the great reward that is given for managing it is far more sharply drawn in Luke's minors' parable than it is in Matthew's talents' parable.

Here, for faithfully managing a few months' wages, they get the rule of whole cities. The parable, it seems to me, is referring to AD 70, not to the end of all things. The nobleman who has received his father's kingdom, returning and judging his servants and his rebellious subjects, is Christ, returning to judge his people and the land in AD 70.

The fact that the judgement of Christ is not going to happen immediately does not mean it is referring to some point in the very long distant future, thousands of years hence. The first two servants are rewarded with different levels of responsibility. The final servant, however, is lazy and indolent.

He doesn't think that he has anything personally to gain from acting as a faithful steward of his master. He ventured nothing, he just sought to avoid losing it. And importantly, his

behaviour was based upon a perception of his master that was uncharitable and false.

We could maybe think of this in terms of a form of faith that is merely concerned with preserving what we have for our own sake, rather than actually doing something with the gifts and the other things that have been entrusted to us. The wealth entrusted to the sterile service of the unfaithful servant is then handed over to the most fruitful and faithful servant. And the parable ends with the destruction of the wicked and rebellious subjects.

This is similar to the parable of the wicked vinedressers in various ways. Here the citizens who rebel are the Israelites who will not receive Christ, who has gone away and received his kingdom, and they reject him, persecuting his servants in the church and seeking to destroy them. The consequence of this is that they are brought before this new king and destroyed themselves.

This parable is in some respects a surprising response to the expectation of the disciples that the kingdom would appear immediately. They are going to Jerusalem, and yet this is not going to be the time when the kingdom appears. Christ, the nobleman in the passage, is going to have to go away and receive his kingdom from his father.

And then he is going to come back, and then he is going to judge the people who have rejected him. The destruction of the rebellious citizens will be the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, the sign that he has received his kingdom. It will also involve judgment and blessing for his servants.

Those who are faithful will expand in their responsibilities, and those who have been unfaithful will be condemned. A question to consider. The minor is taken from the wicked servant and given to the servant with the ten minors.

What is the significance of this detail of the parable?