

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. ^{62:1} For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. ² The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. ³ You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Dear rejoicing Christians,

There's a guy on a radio talk show, Christian financial advisor named Dave Ramsey, who, when someone calls in to his show and asks how he's doing, responds, "*Better than I deserve!*" I like that answer. It helps us realize something very important. As sinners, we deserve nothing. But as *forgiven* sinners, we have received the greatest gift and blessing we could ever receive.

With that truth in mind, it's no wonder Isaiah writes what he does. "I should be toast, but instead I'm God's loved and blessed child!" That attitude helps us understand our theme for today: ***Delight and Rejoice in the Lord!*** (1) *He has clothed me with garments of salvation*, (2) *He makes praise spring up before all nations*, and (3) *He considers me his precious possession*.

1

Isaiah says (as our theme reflects), "***I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God.***" Do you and I delight and rejoice in God? Or let me put it this way: Do other people *see* that you and I delight and rejoice in God? Would people who know us use this phrase to describe us?

Now, that's not to say that Christians always have to be giddy and jokesters. There are days and times when smiles and laughs simply don't fit the situation. But our Christian faith does color the way we see things and our attitudes about things. Here's one important reason why we "***delight greatly***" and "***rejoice in our God.***" Isaiah writes, "***He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.***" We can smile from ear to ear because God has given us a whole new set of clothes! The designer label on them says, "**Redeemed by Christ!**" The stained, rotting clothes of sin and shame have been completely covered by the cleansing blood of Jesus.

That unkind thought you had recently about another person who rubs you wrong? That sin is covered by righteous robe of Jesus! That downer day when all you did was complain about things? Covered by Jesus! The times we could have heard the Word with our fellow Christians but decided other earthly pursuits were more important? That sin, too, is covered by the blood of Jesus. All of them are!

What a great cause for "***delight and rejoicing***" to know that the deep, once indelible stains of my sins are completely cleansed by the perfect life and sacrificial death of a caring Savior. What a delight to know that my debt has been completely wiped out by Jesus.

So if someone asks us, "*How are you?*" I'm with Dave Ramsey on this one. We can all say, "Better, *much* better, than I could ever deserve!"

2

Isaiah continues: "***For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.***" The Lord wants not only us but also all others to be able to "***delight and rejoice***" in him too. Like him, we, too, want the "***garments of salvation***" to be worn by all people. Isaiah's words are foreshadowing something: the spread of the gospel and the growth of the New Testament church. Just imagine if Isaiah could be here today with us in North Fond du Lac. What joy would fill his heart and tears would

come to his eyes as he saw the fulfillment of God's promises as he looked at your faces and saw you and your believing families. You are proof that, ***“as the soil makes the sprout come up....so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”***

Monday is Epiphany. We remember the non-Jewish Magi who traveled to Israel to meet and worship the Christ-child. Jesus was a little Jewish baby, but he came for a whole world of sinners who needed forgiveness and eternal life -- including us.

The question is, how are we doing at carrying on Isaiah's prophecy? God didn't say that the Word should come this far to this place and then stop here. No, the Lord wants this ***“sprouting and growing”*** to continue until the hands on the clock stop when Jesus returns on the Last Day. Is there more we can be doing? Can we pay off our mortgage sooner so we can use those offerings to expand our outreach to our community and area? Are we inviting our family and friends and encouraging one another to hear the good news faithfully, i.e., weekly? Are we living our faith in full color for the world to see so that others might become interested in finding out more about our Savior? That's how the Spirit wants to use us so that more ***“sprouting and growing”*** happens. Here's how Isaiah put it: ***“For Zion's sake (the sake of Christ's eternal church) I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.”*** In other words, let's let our gospel lights shine!

3

Isaiah's words continue: ***“The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.”*** We can delight and rejoice in our new name. Because of the Savior, no longer will we be called unworthy, lumps of coal, rebels, and the spiritual walking dead. No, he says, ***“You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”***

A **diadem** is a crown, usually made of precious metals like gold or silver and studded with priceless gems. That's what you are to the Lord: priceless, a crown on his head, a work of art fashioned by him! In the New Testament Peter put this beautifully: ***“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God”*** (1 Peter 2:9). Isn't it astounding that God accepts us as his own family and admits it to the world?

Does the devil catch us moping around, lamenting how ordinary or vanilla our lives are? Do we sometimes envy the titles and positions of people who make the headlines? What does God say is **your** title and position?: ***“A crown of splendor in his hands!”*** And yet we worry about self-image or self-esteem? No need! He has invested heavily in you. In Christ you are deeply loved and have value that will never diminish, not in a million years, not ever!

And that, fellow precious Christians, is what causes us to say with Isaiah this day, this New Year, and every day from now through all eternity: ***“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God!”*** So how are we doing? Thankfully, much better than we deserve!

Amen.