

Isaiah 12

Lent 4, March 27, 2022
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You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.

² "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid;

for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my

salvation."³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵ "Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. ⁶ Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

In the famous musical "Les Miserables," based upon the classic novel of the same name by Victor Hugo, the poor citizens of Paris, France in 1832 are in revolution against their local government. And being a musical, the entire story is told from beginning to end with various songs, but one song is repeated several times and serves as overarching chorus of sorts. It's called "Do you hear the people sing?" The lyrics go like this: "Do you hear the people sing, singing a song of angry men? It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again, when the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums there is a life about to start when tomorrow comes."

It's a very moving piece, the rallying cry of an oppressed population standing arm in arm against tyranny and oppression. And as that song goes up, it inspires more and more people to bravely stand together against the Parisian nobility. Of course, there's another perspective on that song as well, that of the Parisian Nobility and the armies throughout the city who hear these rebels singing. To them, it has the opposite effect. Rather than inspired, they are angered and seek all the more to put down the unruly mob.

There's a similar dynamic in our text this morning as well; Isaiah calls upon the people of Israel to sing. But this isn't the song of angry men like in Les Miserables, this is a song of joy! A song of salvation! This is the song of the people of God, who have seen His marvelous deeds of salvation. They sing knowing that God's wrath has been turned away from them forever. But now the doubt that might creep into our heads is this: "Will I be in that throng, singing the song of salvation? This song of joy? Will I truly be included?" Because I'm going to be honest with you, I don't always feel like singing that song of joy. Sometimes the doubt creeps in, "Maybe I will be on the other side of that song."

The sermon this morning will seek to answer those doubts, and to arrive at it, we'll be considering the theme: **"Do You Hear the People Sing?" Don't ask "Who" is singing? Instead ask "Why" they are singing.**

Isaiah wrote this hymn of praise at a time when the Israelites needed a pick-me-up type of song. The nation had gone the way of the heathen. They no longer worshipped the one true God, instead they trusted in themselves and gods of their own creation. And so, God told the Israelites that harsh punishment would come upon them because of their rebellion. Even so, they *still* wouldn't repent. Thankfully, there did remain a faithful few within Israel that still looked for their coming salvation, that still trusted in the Lord's deliverance. And so, the Lord spoke these words through Isaiah to them. He says a day will come when you, the faithful few will sing a song of joy and rejoicing, a song of salvation.

Even knowing that bit, you still kind of feel lost when you start into this text. I've been known to fall asleep on the couch when Jess and I are watching movies or tv shows at night, and I'll wake up confused and ask, "I think I dozed off, what did I miss?" And she'll say something along the lines of, "Well you fell asleep an hour and a half ago." That's kind of what it's like just jumping right into the beginning of chapter 12 here,

it's like coming into the end of a movie that you'd missed. Our text starts out, ***"You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to you, O Lord.'"*** And just jumping in like that, you have to ask, "What's the day that He's talking about? You can't start a sermon text referring to 'that day' as if we're all on the same page; what is this special day?"

So, it's pretty obvious that we need to expand our horizons a bit, at least to the previous chapter, so that we can get the context. We find some of that context in the verse immediately preceding our sermon text, the last verse of Chapter 11. Isaiah is talking about ***"That day,"*** and he says on that day ***"there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt."*** I want to focus on the connection that God sets up between the first Exodus when God led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and this future experience that Isaiah is referring to when He says on ***"that day"*** there will be singing and rejoicing and so on.

Now, when you look back at the events of the Exodus, you can see a pattern emerge. In fact, this pattern begins even before Moses had gone to Egypt, when God was instructing Moses what to do and what to say. In that section, we find Moses in doubt. He makes the excuse that he's not good at public speaking, and then he says, ***"What if they don't believe me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you!'"*** And so, God gives him some miraculous signs to show to the people of Israel so that they *do* believe him, and he sends him to His brother Aaron, so that Aaron could be the spokesman. And they do all that God commanded. Aaron speaks the words, Moses performs the signs, and at the end of that chapter we see the people's reaction: ***"And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped."*** (Exodus 4:31)

We see the same pattern later as the actual Exodus begins. Many of you probably know how that all goes. God sends Ten Plagues over Egypt, finally Pharaoh let's God's people go, but then he changes his mind and chases them to the Red Sea. The people of God have no way out, and then God raises up the waters, His people walk through on dry. And when they get to the other side, they see the Lord's deliverance and sing praises to God. In fact, they sing in words remarkably similar to the song in our text, ***"The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation!"*** (Exodus 15:2) And this is something we see again and again throughout the history of the church—the Lord delivers his people and they worship Him in song. That's why at Easter-time we celebrate with song; it's the natural reaction to the Lord's deliverance!

But there's a darker side to this pattern as well that casts a shadow over our text. You think of all those signs that the Lord was performing through Moses in Egypt, and the Children of Israel saw them and rejoiced in the Lord—but Pharaoh saw and did not rejoice. Instead, we're told the Lord hardened his heart as judgment for his unbelief. And then when the Lord parted the Red Sea and allowed the children of Israel to safely pass through, and they saw the Lord's power and they sang praises of joy to Him—Pharaoh and the Egyptians also stood there and saw the seas rise up. And instead of thinking, "The God of Israel—He is God!" They continued to chase, and the power of the Lord did not work out in the Egyptians' favor. While the Israelites sang, the Egyptians did not.

After God brought the Children of Israel to the promised land, and they went and started driving out the peoples, and God used miraculous means to do it, the enemies of Israel saw these things and rightly recognized that the God of Israel was powerful. Songs of praises went up—but it did not come from those nations. Even recognizing God's power, they sat silently in stubborn unbelief.

As we approach the Easter season, we can see this same pattern in the events around Christ's resurrection. There's the soldier at the cross who saw the signs and said, "Truly this was the Son of God." There's the women and the disciples who found the evidence of the resurrection and they rejoiced! But then we also saw the reaction of the chief priests, who were told the first-hand accounts from the guards who had been guarding Jesus' tomb when He arose, and instead of rejoicing or rightly recognizing that Jesus was who He said He was, they paid off the guards and told them to lie and say the disciples had stolen the body.

And so, we can read the thread of joy tying together the words of the song in our text, ***"I will give thanks to you O Lord, . . . God is my strength and my song, . . . give thanks to the Lord, . . . Sing praises to the Lord, . . . shout and sing for joy!"*** Again, this is one of the reactions to seeing the saving power of the Lord, but we also know that there's entirely different response out there as well. There are those who do not shout and sing for joy. That's the response of those who will not be saved, like Pharaoh and the others. Or simply put, there are those whom God delivers and those whom God does not.

The first verse of our text says, ***"You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.'"*** What if that doesn't include you? How do we know that we are in the group doing the singing, and not in that group that receives God's judgment together with Pharaoh? What if we are not in the group whom God delivers? How could we really know until Judgment Day whether God has turned His anger *away* from me and from you? Isaiah goes on and describes in his next chapter the judgment that is awaiting those who will not be singing. He writes, ***"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it."*** (Isaiah 13:9)

"Do you hear the people sing?" Who exactly is it that's going to be singing? And am I included, because I sure would like to be, but how can I know for sure? After all, there are many days of my life that I don't exactly feel like rejoicing or singing, maybe that means I'm not in this choir. I know at times in my life I have thought frequently about this question; I've thought, "What if I spend my life going to church and thinking I'll be saved, and then I find out on Judgment Day I was mistaken. What if God has not turned His anger *from* me but is instead very angry with me still." Dear friends in Christ, this is the wrong line of questioning to pursue. Rather than asking, ***"Who?"*** is singing this song, the better question to ask is, ***"Why?"*** this song is being sung. And the answer to that will clear up any doubt in your mind.

I had to look back again into the previous chapter for some more context, to find out if I really was included in this group of people singing for joy, or if I would be left out with the rest of the people that God will condemn. And I stumbled across this verse in chapter 11, verse 10 specifically, and here Isaiah explains what this ***"Day"*** is all about. He says, ***"In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."*** This is a verse that opens up this choir of the righteous to you and to me.

But what does it mean exactly? Well, there's another person in the Bible who is interested in this particular verse and what it means. It's the Apostle Paul. He quotes it in his letter to the Romans. He says ***"And again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.'"*** (Romans 15:12) We could have all just been easily reckoned together with Egypt and Pharaoh and the chief priests and the foreign nations and received God's judgment. We could have easily been on the outside of this joyful throng facing that day of the Lord and His wrath and fierce anger. But instead, He gave us a doorway to heaven. He gave us a Shepherd to lead us by waters of life and restore our souls.

You see, ***“That day”*** that is the cause of all this rejoicing in our text—it’s already come. That day was the day when Christ Jesus, the Root of Jesse, was raised up before the people of the world upon the cross and crucified—but as Isaiah says, ***“His resting place is glorious.”*** For He rose! And He ascended into heaven! And He is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty! He has put all princes and authorities and powers under his feet, and at His name every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth!

And this glorious, risen and ascended Lord is the one inviting you through the words of Isaiah to draw from the well of salvation which He has won. Jesus says to you: ***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*** (John 7:37-38) The spiritual thirst that gnaws at us when we are overwhelmed by our guilt over sin and the feeling of doubt over our eternal destination; Jesus dispelled all of that on ***“that great day.”***

Because on that day, Jesus took on the anger of God. ***“He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21) The well of God’s wrath has been dried up for you and for me, He has truly turned his anger away forever. It’s just as the prophet Micah declares: ***“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.”*** (Micah 7:18)

Yes, truly the, ***“LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become our salvation.”*** This is why the people sing. And it’s important to focus on the ***“why”*** of this song rather than the ***“who.”*** Because whenever we start focusing on ourselves and questioning, “Why me? Why would I be included? How could I be?”—you’ll never come up with a good enough answer. Instead, the question we need to ask is “Why?” And that question leads us to the foot of the Cross, where we are promised that the blood poured out there—it covers even us. As the Apostle Paul declares, ***“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them,”*** (2 Corinthians 5:19)—and that includes you. You will not be left out of this singing throng. No, you are in it, right now, because God has assured you that He is YOUR Savior, that He is YOUR Strength and YOUR Shield, that He has become YOUR salvation.

Now, at the end of Les Miserables, that singing multitude of rebels, they get put down and killed, the rebellion squashed—but the last scene of the musical is the crowd still singing after they’re dead. They are defeated, but still they sing. The song that we sing today, the song of salvation and joy and rejoicing in the deliverance of our Savior, that’s a song that we’ll continue singing as well, but we’ll be singing in victory. Because ***“Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:57)

And so, members of Faith, ***“Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. ⁶Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”*** Thanks be to God for placing this song on our lips, may He grant that we continue to sing it into eternity. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) ***Amen.***