

First Sunday of Christmas

BELIEVING IS SEEING

Isaiah 61:10–62:3

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Analysis by Bill White

*10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being 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 with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

*11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.⁶² For Zion's sake I will
not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.*

*2 The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.*

*3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*

DIAGNOSIS: The Glory of Jerusalem? We Don't See It.

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Glorious But Empty Words*

The prophet, speaking on behalf of the community, rejoices and praises God because God has clothed them with salvation and righteousness. Vindication and restoration are coming to Zion as surely as a garden produces what is sown. It all sounds so wonderful and glorious. But where is the evidence? Jerusalem is in ruins. Yes, in time walls and buildings will get rebuilt. But to this very day, has Jerusalem been vindicated such that she shines like the dawn? Is her salvation like a burning torch? Have the nations and kings witnessed her glory? Nice message Isaiah, but we moderns just don't see it!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We'll Work for This Ourselves*

Seeing is believing. What we see in the world is wars and threats of wars. We see peoples and situations crying out for vindication and restoration, but we see none. We see no truly righteous people. How can we believe in a God who says he will save his chosen people and make them righteous when we don't seem to be seeing anybody being saved from their circumstances and being made righteous? How can we believe in a God who says he will vindicate and gloriously restore his peoples' capital city such that nations and kings will be wowed, when century after century it has not happened? If all this Jerusalem stuff comes to pass we may give it a second look, but for now we're better off believing in ourselves, trusting our own efforts to work for righteousness, salvation, vindication and restoration.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *We'll Work Ourselves to Death*

However, the harsh, cruel reality is that no matter how hard we try, we human beings cannot bring about the vindication and

restoration of Jerusalem (or any place else for that matter). We can neither save ourselves nor make ourselves righteous. Nor can we do the same anyone else. The very Law we would keep to achieve these ends actually and eventually exposes our failure, and in the end, condemns us to death.

PROGNOSIS: Glorious Sight

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Isaiah Is Pointing Us to Jesus*

But the salvation and righteousness of which Isaiah speaks is not the work of a nation or of human beings. The vindication and restoration is not of a present day city on a present day mount called Zion. Salvation and righteousness has come through the babe of Bethlehem whose birth we just celebrated. It is this Jesus who brings liberty for all held captive by sin and death. By his death on a cross and glorious resurrection, Jesus fulfills the Law and makes possible salvation from sin, evil and death. Jesus is God's righteousness and he will clothe the faithful in his righteousness. And it is Jesus who will one day bring about a New Jerusalem.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *We'll See Jesus Working This Out*

Believing is seeing. Jesus' salvation and righteousness is offered to us. As the Word Incarnate is proclaimed, heard, and read, we receive Jesus' free gift of faith. This is faith that promises us salvation from sin, death and the devil. This is faith that clothes us in the righteousness of Christ. This is faith that empowers us to cling to the promises of God's Word.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Glorious Sight, Glorious Words*

What is more, through eyes of faith in Christ we now see how God is at work in the world vindicating and restoring creation. Having received God's gracious gift of faith in Jesus Christ, we

moderns now join the prophet in rejoicing and praising God because God has clothed us with salvation and righteousness. Yes, we see it now; vindication and restoration are coming to Zion as surely as a garden produces what is sown. We might even find ourselves singing along with Simeon (Luke 2:30-32) as we share this Good News with others. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God!