

Singing in the Ruins

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[0 : 00] Last month I saw there was a video released from Ukraine, from Kyiv. It wasn't an official video, it was someone's cell phone video,! But it went viral very quickly.

And the video was of a Ukrainian family whose house had been bombed by a Russian cruise missile.

It had come and totally demolished their house. But that wasn't what caused the video to go viral, just this house.

It was the fact that this family and their church family, they turned out to be Christians, were standing in a circle in the ruins of the house singing worship songs.

And the camera panned around, you can find it on the internet, but the camera panned around and you could see their faces of these people in the ruins of this bombed out house. You would have expected them to be distressed and sad, but as they were singing, they were joyful.

[1 : 02] And it was such a strange picture to see these people joyful after such a disaster had just happened. And as I watched that video, I thought there is a...

It describes in a scene what Christian worship is. You see, Christian worship is the ability to sing joyfully even in bad situations.

Well, the title of today's sermon is Singing in the Ruins. And we're going to tackle the question this morning of how that is even possible.

How it is possible to find joy in our lives even when the world is falling apart around us. And the answer to that question, how we do that, is actually found in today's verse in Isaiah.

We're looking at Isaiah 53, verse 9 to 10. And so, open your Bibles there, Isaiah 53. And we're going to be focusing on verse 9 to 10.

[2 : 08] Because this is written to people who lived in a ruined city. It's written to the residents of Jerusalem following the Babylonian invasion and captivity.

And the Babylonians, this great empire, had come in and destroyed the city of Israel. They destroyed the temple. And the few that they didn't take into captivity were still under their oppressive rule living in Jerusalem in these ruins.

It was a ruined city. But these residents of Jerusalem here in Isaiah 52, verse 9 to 10.

That's what we're looking at today. They are called in these ruins, in the ruined city, nonetheless, to burst into song in 52, verse 9.

They're commanded to sing even amidst these ruins. And it seems counterintuitive to be in these ruins, to be in this ruined city, and yet to be singing with joy.

[3 : 11] Much like that Ukrainian video that I saw. But there was a very good reason that they were called to sing in the ruins. And as we discover what it is, this morning, we're going to actually learn the secret of how to find real joy, even in the midst of our own ruins and troubles in our lives.

But first, before we find that secret, we first need to understand why we're in the ruins in the first place. Why the world is like it is.

Why we have the troubles we do. And I'm pretty sure, because I'm a pastor, I know you, I speak to you, and I'm pretty sure most of us have had some kind of troubles this last week.

Some things that have been weighing on our minds, or some issues that we've been going through. And it's important every now and again to stop and go, but why? If we have a good God, why is it like, why is life like this?

Why do we go, why do we face the troubles we do in life? Why is the world like this? Why are we in the ruins? Well, it turns out, when we read the Bible, that it's the same reason why the Israelites were in the ruins in Jerusalem.

[4 : 18] And that is because of their sin. Because of their sin. When they, in fact, ask, why are we in this situation? Why has God allowed this? Why has He allowed His holy city, Jerusalem, to be invaded by the Babylonians?

Listen to Isaiah's answer. It's back in Isaiah 42, from verse 24. It says, Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers?

Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow His ways. They did not obey His law. So He poured out on them His burning anger, the violence of war.

It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand. It consumed them, but they did not take it to heart. That's why we're in the ruins.

Same reason they were. Because of sin. Now, am I saying that the particular suffering that you're now facing in your life at this moment is because of your sins?

[5 : 30] Maybe. Could be. But not always. And yet, it is the result of the state we're in, and the sinfulness of humanity, and a world that is, by nature, disconnected from God.

God. You see, Israel's story, the story of this nation that we read in the Old Testament, is actually the story of all of us. It tells the story of a people who actually knew God, and yet they still decided to go their own way, rather than to live under His good rule.

Isn't that all of us by nature? You see, Israel's story is actually the story of all of us. It's the story of humanity in general. I mean, in Genesis, that's exactly what happened, right?

Humanity knew God. We knew God. We knew our Creator in right relationship, and yet we decided that we would be better off going our own way than living under His rule.

And that story is just repeating itself in the nation of Israel. But what's shocking is that they are God's people who have been rescued already out of Egypt.

[6 : 41] We know the story, right? These are God's people who had been called back into a special relationship with Him after the fall, and yet, eventually, they also still fell back into this sin where they rejected His rule.

It just repeats itself. It's our nature. It shows what is natural for all of us. It's in our DNA to rebel against our God.

All of us. Verse 24 of Isaiah 42, at the end there. For they would not follow His ways.

They did not obey His law. It's not just talking about Israel. Israel was just used. God used Israel as a test case to show us our own hearts that we are all like this.

And that sin, that natural inclination we all have to turn against the rule of our God and to live under our own rule is the reason that we're in the ruins. It's the reason this world is in ruins because that is humanity's nature.

[7 : 50] The world is in ruins because of that. It might not always look that way. Sometimes, maybe when we go on holiday to a nice place, in that moment it doesn't look like the world's in ruins.

But the truth is, this world is in ruins. And it's because of this. In fact, ruins is a good description because what are ruins, if you think about it?

What are ruins? Ruins are things that have been broken so that they're not fulfilling their original purpose. Right? So a ruined wall cannot hold anything up.

And ruins are ugly. Ruins don't look nice. Ruins are not what their designer, their architect intended them to look like.

That is a description of the world we're in. Because it's not fulfilling the purpose. It's not what its creator, its designer intended for it to be.

[9 : 00] That is the state of our world and that is the state of every life that is not under God's rule. It's a ruin. For some people, it's obviously a ruin and they would admit it.

They would admit my life is a ruin. I've met many people like this who are just, things are not working. They're living in this ugly situation with broken relationships.

Maybe an ugly divorce in a broken home. Or they're under the control of various addictions to porn or to alcohol or to drugs.

And it's just ugly and it's a ruined life. So some lives are obviously ruins. But there are many others that aren't so obvious. Many people have decent lives and they have nice jobs with a nice family and they go on nice holidays.

And they're doing well, we would say. But you know what that is? All that is, is that people have managed to build nice little shelters, nice little homes inside the ruins.

[10:14] And they've managed to put a nice roof over and furnish it with a few nice comfy chairs almost to the point that they forget that there are ruins. That they forget that they're actually in the midst of ruins.

Because they've got enough resources, typically people with enough resources can do that. They can hedge themselves from the ruins outside almost so that they forget that there are ruins there at all.

But the truth is, no matter how many resources you have, no one can do that forever. It's only a matter of time before the ruins catch up.

Right? And some tragedy befalls you. Or you get that terminal diagnosis. No matter how much money you have, no matter how much you've built a nice little shelter in the ruins, you can't stop that from coming eventually.

Or if it's not a terminal diagnosis or some tragedy, it's just the long inevitable creep of age and frailty that you can't reverse.

[11:19] And that no one can hide from. And the reason we suffer that is because we're in the ruins. Even if we try to hide ourselves from the fact we are living in the ruins.

All of us are actually living in the ruins. We're living under the consequences of sin. And the Bible says that is why we suffer all that we suffer in this ruined world.

And yet, God's people are called to sing out with joy in the middle of these ruins.

Why? Why? I'll tell you why. Isaiah 52, 9-10 tells us why. Because we have a song to sing. Verse 9 of Isaiah 52.

Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem. Why? Second half of that verse. For the Lord has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem.

[12:25] He has redeemed Jerusalem. Jerusalem. That word, redeem. Redeemed is at the very heart of why we can sing in the ruins.

So, this series, this little mini-series of Isaiah we've been going through, we've called it the Gospel of Isaiah. How the prophet Isaiah communicates the good news in the world.

And the first week, two weeks ago, we saw that the Gospel of Isaiah is that God reigns. His rule is here through Jesus' rule and His people.

Secondly, last week, we saw that the Gospel of Isaiah is that God is returning. Not only does He reign, but He's returning. He's coming back to make things right. But that, so far, those two, God reigning and God returning, that's not actually good news for sinners.

Right? For sinners who have sinned against that God, God reigning and God returning is actually bad news unless we have the third element of Isaiah's Gospel which is that God redeems.

[13:37] God reigns, God returns, but the good news for sinners is that God redeems. What does that mean? What does redeem mean? Well, we actually use it in commerce, we use it when we talk about redeeming coupons.

essentially, you know, redeeming means to buy something back, to purchase something at its most basic. And so, this message here in Isaiah 52 that God redeems Jerusalem is telling the people living in those ruins that God is buying back this city.

And the reason He's buying it back, we find out elsewhere in Isaiah, is because basically He wants to do an extreme makeover in this city. We see this in the next two chapters on, Isaiah 54.

Just turn there, if you have your Bibles in front of you, look at God's plan to do an extreme makeover to these ruins of Jerusalem. Isaiah 54 from verse 11 to 12.

Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with lapis lazuli.

[14:58] I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. Isn't that a beautiful picture? You know, you get these people who buy old houses when they've got enough money, they buy these old broken down houses, they call them fixer uppers, where they can get them for like a great price, but they're good at seeing what the house could become, and so they've got these plans to take this really ramshackle house and make it beautiful again.

Well, Jerusalem is the ultimate fixer upper, and God is not seeing them as they currently are in their ruins. What He's seeing, we see here, is what He's going to make them.

That's how God looks at Jerusalem, like this. Even though they're currently in ruins, this is how He looks at them. Actually, what I did this morning was I plugged these descriptions, you know, the city

of lapis lazuli and these sapphires, I put them into AI and I said, tell me what this looks like, and this is what it came up with.

It's actually pretty good. beautiful image, right? But you know what? It's not buildings that God is interested in, but it's people.

This is a metaphor. This description here is a metaphor for how He looks at the people that He wants to save. God wants to buy back people.

[16:39] He wants to buy back ruined lives and give them an extreme makeover and bring them back to their original purpose and make them beautiful again.

And that is the news that the ruined city of Jerusalem receives here in Isaiah 52, that God redeems them. And that is why they sing.

But it goes on and we realize they sing out because not only is that what God wants to do with their lives, that God wants to redeem their lives, but the next verse reveals that He has shown them how He's going to do that.

He's going to reveal how He's going to do it. He's not just saying, I want to fix your life. He's saying, I'm showing you how I'm going to fix your life. how He's going to fix broken lives and we see that in verse 10.

Isaiah 52, verse 10. This is how He's going to redeem these broken lives, these ruins.

[17:45] The Lord will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations. God revealing His holy arm is actually the key to people's comfort, the key to their ability to rejoice in the ruins.

If you want to know the secret of rejoicing in ruins, it's here. God laying bare His holy arm, but we need to understand what that means, right? What is God's holy arm? That's a weird picture.

Well, we see this phrase used elsewhere in the Bible and what it's talking about, when you see the phrase God's holy arm, it describes whenever God does something public and obvious in history, when He intervenes in the normal workings of things in history.

The first time we come across it actually in Scripture is in Exodus, when God powerfully, publicly intervened in history to rescue Israel out of Egypt.

And it was something that no one could ignore. It was obvious, the parting of the sea and the flames of fire and God made it obvious that He was intervening. That is what God's holy arm is, whenever He does something public and obvious to intervene in the normal workings of history.

[19:05] You could think of it like, I don't know if you have ever owned a fish tank. You know those fish tanks that people have with little pumps and they put little like rocks and castles or whatever and the fish swim around and they're very happy.

But every now and again you need to do something to fix or move something around in the fish tank. If you're the owner of the fish tank, maybe the pump's not working or maybe you need to move a rock, what do you do? Well, you roll up your sleeve, right?

And then you plunge your hand and you do what you need to do and you change the pump or you move the rock and the fish are freaking out because they don't know what this giant hand in their world is all about.

That is a picture of what happens when God reveals His holy arm in this world. And normally, like in Exodus, everybody's freaking out when God does that.

But now, how God's going to reveal His holy arm in Isaiah is different and it's revealed in the next chapter and it's surprising and it's not what people expected.

[20:16] It starts in Isaiah 53. and it says this, verse 1, Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. It turns out the arm of the Lord, the way that God is going to publicly intervene in history, is now a person.

And it's a person who comes to earth in humility to suffer. Because the arm of God is Jesus Christ, His Son. Jesus, that man, Jesus, and the reason we make such a big deal about Jesus in this church, is because that man, Jesus, is the way the Creator was going to intervene in world history to buy back people to rebuild ruined lives.

and Jesus coming to this world and dying for sins and rising again bodily is God's public declaration of how He's going to save people from the ruins.

[21 : 48] Because as we look at that and see what it means, we see that Jesus' death atones for sins. He actually pays for the sins of other people who trust in Him and His resurrection breaks the power of sin and death to open up the way to a new restored physical life in a restored creation.

We understand this all now that when we look at Jesus and we see His death and resurrection in Jesus, God has clearly shown how He saves humanity to anybody who's willing to look.

But not all look and not all see. to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

So, I mean, the question I must ask you is have you seen? Have you seen? Have you seen? Have you beheld God's publicly available revealed plan to save you from your ruins?

Have you seen it yet? and to save you from a ruined world? To save this world from ruins? He's made it available for you to see.

[23 : 07] Have you seen it yet? Because if you haven't, you need to. You need to. It is discoverable. It is visible.

You can see it. God has given us all the information we need to see how He saves people. He's made it publicly available. What Jesus did is documented and it is validated.

Look into it if you haven't yet. If you think Christianity is just another blind faith where people just have got to believe by faith things that they can never be sure of, if that's what you think, you are wrong.

Okay? Christianity is completely different because it's based on validated historical proof, documented stuff. God has revealed His holy arm. He hasn't kept it hidden.

Anybody can see it. And so you need, if you haven't seen it yet, you need to see it. You need to see this and that's why we have courses we have in this church Discover Jesus is where you come and you can see what God has revealed.

[24 : 07] Or, just look at our God course on our Connect app where you can watch at home four short sessions where we scratch the surface but we look at the beginning of just what God has made known to us, what He's revealed.

If you haven't done that, if you haven't looked into it and you haven't seen this yet, please do. Don't waste any more time. You've only got this life on earth to look into the stuff God has made known.

And here at this church we've got all the resources you need to do that.

Please make use of them. God has revealed His holy arm. He's revealed the way He saves so that we can know for sure how He's going to save us and how He is saving us.

And it's because we can know that. It's because we can know it for sure that we have something to sing about. Singing in the ruins is based on something we can actually know for sure.

Not based on blind faith. Even while we're still in the ruins because of what we can know for sure we have something to sing. I was watching a movie a war movie a while back and it was a movie about prisoners of war who had been pilots who had been shot down and they had been captured by the enemy and they had been in this prisoner of war camp for a long time and it was they were really worn out and they you know they were badly treated.

[25 : 33] But then what they didn't know is that their own forces had managed in the time that they were in prison to advance and to take over the territory to conquer it back from the enemy and they found out about this when they saw their planes flying over for the first time and they saw these planes and the planes were like flapping their wings to say hey we've come we've arrived and these prisoners just burst into cheering the prison guards however they were freaked out they were they were stressing now the prisoners were cheering but their situation hadn't changed they were still in the prison the prison guards were still over them and yet because they had seen something because they had because it has been revealed to them how they're going to be saved they could sing even while they were still in the prison see that is the story that is the situation we're in now God has come we've seen in Isaiah he has defeated evil and he has revealed his victory to us in the ruins so that we can sing even while we're still here and the forces of evil they are scattering and they are fretting because of it even though they might still send and make life difficult for us the truth is we've seen the revealed victory of God so we can sing and when we sing they freak out and that is what those of us who have seen

God's redemption are not only able to do but we are meant to do we are called to sing in the ruins we are told to sing in the ruins because that testifies to those around us when we sing in the ruins and so in closing the last point I just want to look at is briefly three ways that we are called to sing in the ruins those of us who have seen God's redemption in Jesus Christ how are we called to sing in

the ruins three ways firstly we're called to sing to ourselves first of all we're called to sing the song of redemption to ourselves to remind us of these truths to remind our own minds as we're going to learn from this evening onwards and I hope you're going to come join us from 6pm we've got to renew our own minds we've got to take our thoughts captive to what is true and if we don't do that our thoughts are going to be taken captive by the world if we don't let the truth take our thoughts captive and we do that with truth that we know things we can know about

God's actual revelation to us about himself and his plans and the future of this world and the only way we can do that is by gathering like this by gathering in growth group by opening this up opening this up every day in our lives and letting our lives get saturated with these truths over and over again make time in our day to put aside other things and to open this up and let God's truth come back in and saturate our minds and take our thoughts captives if we start each day with reading the things we can know for sure you know what happens we're able to sing in that day no matter what that day throws at us that's the first way we are to sing we are to sing each day by opening this up and taking our thoughts captive again by the truths it tells us but secondly and more importantly actually we are to sing to each other the Bible is very strong in this how we are to remind each other of the song of redemption when I say the song of redemption

I don't literally mean we go up to each other and start singing it means we've got to communicate these truths over and we can sing to each other if you've got a decent voice then feel free but the idea is that we've got to remind each other of the truths because it's so easy for us to forget look again at Isaiah 52 verse 9 and notice a word that I bet you didn't notice the first time and it's an important word burst into songs of joy together that word together not just burst into songs of joy by yourself gather with other people who have seen this truth and sing with them sing to them burst into songs of joy together you know why this is so important because it's often difficult to sing to ourselves isn't it especially when we're feeling the ruins especially when things are falling apart in our lives and we're weighed down those are the hardest times it is to remember these truths and we don't want to open the bible we don't want to read it that's when we need other Christians to come and remind us of what these truths are it's why we need each other and this is a point that is stressed throughout the new testament over and over again that Christians are told to remind each other of the truths we know

Colossians 3 16 let the word of Christ dwell richly among you in 1 Thessalonians 4 it's a passage that I'm sure you would have heard at Christian funerals Paul the apostle is writing to grieving Christians who have lost loved ones who have died and he writes this in 1 Thessalonians 4 he says brothers and sisters we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope we don't want you to be uninformed we don't want you to have the wrong thoughts we want you to know the truth about this and then he goes on to remind them of the truth of the physical resurrection and the coming world of restoration we can know for sure because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and then he ends that chapter with these words 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 18 therefore encourage one another with these words he's saying

[31 : 45] I'm giving you truth now remind each other of it especially when people need to hear it let the word of Christ dwell richly among you encourage one another with these words or literally another translation is comfort each other with these words comfort each other with truth that's the idea you see Christian comfort Christian comfort is different to worldly comfort Christian comfort is not just sympathy it's not just oh I'm so sorry you're going through that let me give you a hug I'm so sorry I hope things get better let me make you a meal now that's great do that but Christian comfort is more than that Christian comfort goes further and it says also let me remind you of what we can know let me remind you of what I was reminded of when I went through that situation you're now going through let me remind you of the truth let me share with you a can know and then he shares his own testimony of how he received comfort from

God knowing these truths and how you can as well so it's because of his experience of knowing this and what that means in his difficulties that he can now comfort others that's Christian comfort it's a deep thing it's not just pat on the head it's it's a it's a deep communication of truths that we have seen and we can know exactly when we need to hear them that's how Christians are to comfort each other we're to bring God's truth into each other's lives and we're to share our own testimonies of how that truth comforted us and that's why by the way that's why you need other Christians in your life that's why coming to church listening not like you need to earn anything with God it's that

you need these people you need Christians more than you know that's why we need to be in growth groups where we have these relationships with other Christians that God has provided in our church family it's why you need other Christians in your life because they are the way God reminds you of his truth in the very moments you are particularly suffering in the midst of these ruins and you're going through a really bad time and you've just had a really tough week and things are falling apart the worst thing you can do is not come to church because this is where we literally sing to each other in the ruins it's in those weeks that you need to be here even more and that's why we do corporate worship that's why we sing these songs together out loud not just to sing to God but to sing to each other that is one of the main reasons we do corporate worship so that we can sing these truths to each other realize that when we're here on

Sunday morning everybody here is meant to minister not just the guys standing up here everyone ministers at least in singing with conviction and with joy to the person next to you you minister to the person next to you when you sing these songs because you really believe them and that comes out in how you sing them so that's the song we sing the song of redemption!

to each other but thirdly and finally we are to sing this song to the world outside because look at what God has always intended Isaiah 52 verse 10 the Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God how will all the ends of the earth see the salvation of our God when God's people are singing about it out there God always intended for the world to hear this song because of what Jesus has done!

[36 : 20] for human! anybody can now be redeemed from the ruins anybody in this world no matter who they are no matter what they've done no matter how messed up their lives are anybody in this world can now because of what God has publicly revealed in Jesus can now be redeemed from the ruins and so everybody needs to know right all of those people out there who are in the!

need to know will do not yet know about the salvation that God has revealed they have not seen it because no one has told them about it it's our job to tell them the church Christians it's our job to sing this song to the world but how do we do that well we do that by getting involved in the work of the church by getting stuck in doing whatever you can to help the mission of the church the kingdom and proclaiming this gospel to people out there and we get involved in our community we do things in our community so that we can build relationships with our community and make the message that we've seen and beheld make it known to others but that's how we do it as a church question is how do you do it in your life with the people that God has uniquely put in your life who have not yet seen these things who have not yet heard how do you share this truth with people in your life well actually it's not as hard as you think it's easy if you let the songs you're singing on Sunday overflow to Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday if you're you see if you're really really joyfully singing about these things if you're really joyfully singing the song of redemption to yourself every day you're letting these truths saturate your mind and you're singing it to your brothers and sisters at church if you're really excited about it then it will naturally overflow to the world out there and to the other people in your life the key to sharing the gospel I run an evangelism course at the college but you know what all the things we can learn about how to share the gospel what to say and how to make opportunities and all that the key you want to know the key to sharing the gospel to the people in your lives is being excited about it that's the key because when you're excited about it you don't even need to go on a course it'll happen naturally yes you do maybe need to learn how to say things well but the key is being excited about it and so brothers and sisters here at St. Mark's let's get excited about redemption let's get let's excite each other about it let's use our services as opportunities to remind each other and get excited again about redemption about what God has done and is now doing in the world to rescue us from the ruins let's learn to sing the song of redemption together until we can't keep quiet and it overflows to a world looking on and wondering why on earth we're singing in the ruins let's pray oh lord we we thank you for your grace on us and your plan to redeem us from the ruins and to make us beautiful and what you intended lord we thank you so much that you have done everything in Jesus Christ to save us you have revealed your holy arm and lord we pray that you would help us to see it properly I pray for anybody here this morning or listening to this recording who has not yet seen what you have revealed what Jesus has done for us and lord those of us who have seen that help us to sing that song to each other and to the world around us for your glory in Jesus name amen