

## “Restoration”

**Occasion** Evening Service at Therfield Chapel

**Day, Date & Time** Sunday 9 October 2005 at 18:30

**Basis** Isaiah 54 & 55

**Reading** Isaiah 54:1 – 55:13

**Songs** from Mission Praise

**Author/Speaker** Paul Rydon

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What does restoration mean to you?

It could be a piece of antique furniture.

A grandfather clock maybe.

The case has been discreetly repaired and re-polished.

You can hardly see where the lock had been broken  
and the wood has been mended around it.

The cracked glass has been replaced.

When you open it up and look inside,

the cogs are gleaming  
and the mechanism ticks as smoothly and consistently as when it was made  
many years ago.

It has been restored to its former glory,

just as the clockmaker intended it to be.

Or it may be a period cottage.

The original beams have been uncovered and re-stained.

The lath & plaster walls have been repaired.

The stone fireplace has been uncovered  
and the stones cleaned,

and a log fire burns in the grate once more.

Outside, the stonework have been cleaned and re-pointed.

The chimney stacks have been rebuilt.

The rotting window sills have been replaced

and the doors and window frames have been repainted.

The job has been so well done that the house is as good as new,

if not better than when the builder built it over 100 years ago.

The restoration is complete.

During the week there were one or two programmes on the television about binge drinking  
and the underage alcohol culture in our towns.

And they featured a young man and his friends in the town of Liskeard in Cornwall.

His drinking had affected his work

and he was now unemployed.

And he and his mates drank more now,

because they had nothing else to do.

His life was on a downward spiral,  
but the programme followed the efforts of a social worker,  
who was trying to help him to restore his life to some kind of normality.  
A tough job, but one which would never be complete.

But when we restore things,  
we never do it perfectly.

Some years ago,  
my daughter's MG Midget was rusting away.  
It needed four new wings,  
two new floor pans,  
and a complete re-spray.

So we took it to the workshops of the MG Owners Club at Swavesey  
and they quoted a price that was far beyond Lois's means.  
So we took it to a lesser body shop,  
who did the job for half the price.

But later when the car needed touching up for a special occasion,  
one garage refused to work on the car,  
because the restoration had not been done to the makers' original  
specification.

Today's passage is all about restoration.  
And when God restores, he does so to the Maker's specification.

This restoration is the result of the suffering of God's Servant in the previous chapter.  
It is the restoration of Zion,  
the city of God.

In Isaiah's day this was the city of Jerusalem,  
and the prophecy looks forward to the time when the Jews would return from captivity in  
Babylon and rebuild the Holy City.

But more than restoring just a city is envisaged here.  
This is the restoration of a people.

And not only does it have a fulfilment in the near future,  
but it has a fulfilment in the growth of the Church after the resurrection of Jesus,  
and a future glorious fulfilment at the end of time and on into eternity.

So as we launch into the opening lines of our portion, the call goes out;

"Sing, O barren woman who never bore a child;  
burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour  
because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,"  
says the Lord." (Isaiah 54:1)

The idea that God is married to his people is a recurring theme in the Bible,  
and that is what we see here.

The picture is of a woman who had no children, who had no husband,  
but who can now rejoice because she has both a husband and children,  
more children than those who were married before.

In a culture where women were totally dependant on men  
And where to have many children was a sign of blessing,  
this has huge significance.

The people of God are restored.  
They weren't, of course, when Isaiah was speaking,  
but the picture is prophetic.  
Before the restoration, the people of God had nothing,  
now they have abundance, more than they ever had before.

“Enlarge ..... your tent ...” (54:2)  
(Imagine a nomadic style desert tent,  
such as we see on our televisions from time to time.)  
‘Spread out, make room for more.’  
Such will be the blessings of the city and the land when it is restored  
that they will need more space,  
for they will expand their territory,  
their people  
and their power.  
Then under the hand of God they will be prosperous.

And so the picture builds up as the chapter progresses:

The idea of the restored wife is continued in verses 4-8.

Verse 4: “Do not be afraid, .....  
and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood” (Isaiah 54:4)

But look at verse 5:

“Your Maker is your husband –  
The Lord Almighty is His Name –  
The Holy one of Israel is your Redeemer  
He is called the God of all the earth.” (Isaiah 54:5)

In these verses God explains that he abandoned his people,  
because of their sinfulness.

In anger he rejected them.  
He ‘hid his face’ from them.

But now in compassion he restores them.

In verses 9&10,

God reminisces about the time of Noah.

And he remembers how angry he was  
and how he destroyed the whole earth in a flood.  
And how he made a promise never to flood the earth again in this way.

And now he promises his people that he will never be angry with them again  
and that he will never rebuke them again.

But this time the promise goes much further.

Then, it was ‘while the earth remains’, (remember) ‘seed-time and harvest, summer and winter shall not cease’

But now, even if the mountains move and the hills disappear,  
his unfailing love for his people will not be shaken.

This time, God’s promise will stand  
even after the earth is destroyed.

Do you see the eternal nature of this prophesy?

It reaches forward to the return of the exiles;  
It reaches further forward to the building of the Church of Christ;  
but it also reaches out to the end of time,  
for its final fulfilment.

Only then will the restoration be complete.  
Only then will we be restored to the maker's specification.

And so in verses 11-14,  
we see the utopian city of God developed.

It will be built anew, with brilliant new stones –  
and we know from other bible passages that the stones are the people of God.

Everyone there will be taught by the Lord himself.

The children will live in peace  
Righteousness will reign.

There will be no tyranny and no terror.

And if any one dare attack,  
they will surrender before the wonder of this city.

We may be tempted to sneer or laugh  
at this idealistic picture of the restored people of God.

But we shouldn't,  
for this is God speaking and we need to listen to what he says.

The restoration of Jerusalem and the people of Judea after the return from exile never met this glorious ideal.

It was only partially fulfilled.

The Christian Church after the death and resurrection of Christ  
grew and covered the whole world as it does today,  
thus further, but still only partially, fulfilling this prophecy.

Only when the church,  
the bride of Christ  
is fully perfected at the end of time  
will this prophecy be totally fulfilled.

Then finally,  
and in a strange anti-climax to this chapter (54),  
God opens his mind to us  
and explains that not only do the good things come from him,  
but the hard things of life are also under his control.

Many Christians see the world as a battlefield between God and Satan,  
and certainly the Bible talks often of spiritual warfare going on  
out of our sight.

But here God reassures us that no evil things befall us without his knowledge  
and that everything is under his control.

Some may find this hard to take,  
preferring to believe that all nice things come from God  
and all nasty things come from the Devil.

But God says 'No'  
I send the blacksmith to forge the weapons,  
and I send the destroyer.

But!!!!

The destroyer will not prevail,  
and you will refute every accuser. (Isaiah 54:16-17)

God has given to his people, his servants,  
the power to defend themselves against the attacks of Satan and of men.

And so it has proved to be.  
Neither the Jews,  
nor the Christian church have ever been eradicated,  
in spite of many attempts to destroy them.

And in every age,  
God's people have learnt to refute and withstand those who would attack  
by reason or argument,  
persecution or martyrdom,  
the truth of the Christian Gospel.

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But who will partake of the blessing that is to come?

Chapter 55 is the invitation.  
"Come all you are thirsty ....." (Isaiah 55:1)

Didn't Jesus echo these words when on the last day of the feast,  
not long before his crucifixion,  
he cried out and said,  
"If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!" (John 7:37)

The whole world is invited into the new world.  
And it costs nothing.  
Salvation is free.

We in this Chapel have a policy that we do not charge for anything.  
The Harvest Dinner is free.  
The Carol Service is free.  
The Garden Supper is free.

There are exceptions:  
Punting is one.  
Letton Hall is another,  
but our policy is to charge nothing,  
wherever possible.  
Because the Gospel is free.

Salvation is a gift,  
'plus nothing' as Allon Taffs used to say.

"Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without cost",  
says God through Isaiah.  
How many gospel preachings I sat through in my youth based on these very verses!

The blessings of God were not,  
of course, for the Jews only.

They thought they were,  
     but here and elsewhere,  
         God makes it clear that in his time,  
                     the Gospel would be available to all.

But there is an urgency.  
     Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found' says Isaiah (Isaiah 55:6)

The old preachers in London used to plead with their hearers to come to Christ 'tonight'.  
     Get right with God 'tonight'.  
         'Now is the time' to turn to the Lord.  
     'You might go out of here tonight and get knocked down by a bus  
                                     and wake up in hell!'

Not much chance of that in Therfield,  
         you'd have to lie there and wait till Wednesday.

But the message is the same.  
         God calls today.  
     He may not call you tomorrow.  
     If you keep closing your ears to the demands of God,  
                     you may not hear next time he calls.  
     Now is your opportunity to respond to his love,  
                     and accept his forgiveness.  
     For although the gospel is free,  
         there is a need to repent.

Verse 7 continues the theme:  
     "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the evil man his thoughts.  
     Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him  
     and to our God, for he will freely pardon." (Isaiah 55:7)

Elsewhere we are told that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'. (Romans 3:23)  
     Jesus has paid the price of our sins.  
         But we have to **accept** the free offer of salvation.  
     We have to come and buy,  
         even though the price has already been paid.

Moving on then, there are some other gems in this chapter,  
                     which we must look at before we close.

Verse 8&9 remind us that the thoughts and ways of God are always higher than ours. (Isaiah 55:8-9)  
     He is the Creator,  
         we are the creatures.  
     He is the Redeemer,  
         we are the redeemed.  
     He is our God  
         and we are his servants,  
                     his people.

Our goal then is to think God's thoughts after him.  
     Not to be **as** God in the sense of vying with him for supremacy,  
         but to be **like** God as followers of his holiness and his righteousness.

Verses 10&11 tell us that his Word is as powerful as is He.

When God speaks,

his word accomplishes what he sends it to do.

This is God's guarantee that these things will come to pass.

Today is our opportunity to be a part of this blessing.

To be restored to a relationship with our God,

To receive blessing and peace and eternal life from God for free,

if only we will repent and turn to Christ.

May each one here tonight take that opportunity.

Amen

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