

The City of Light

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2023

Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 0 0] work through it this morning together. This is, it is an amazing passage and there's far more in here than we have time to fully unpack. But I want to take you this morning on a very quick sort of sightseeing tour around this city. Imagine yourself getting into one of those open top bus tours on a sunny day. There's loads of them in Edinburgh. I don't think I've ever seen one in Aberdeen. Don't know why. I'm going to bring you on an open top bus tour around a city even better than Aberdeen. I've redeemed myself there. Because this is, this is God's city.

Right, and we'll take a few stops along the way. We've only got 30 minutes or so. So unfortunately this is going to be the express service. But I guarantee you it'll be worth it because this is a beautiful city. And our first stop is going to be the most important feature of this city.

I don't know if you noticed it as we were reading through the passage there. Last time I was here I preached from Psalm 103. I don't expect you to remember it vividly. But that psalm we saw began and ended with exactly the same phrase and it told us the most important thing about that psalm. And there's a very similar thing going on here in Isaiah 60.

The words aren't identical but there is a repeated theme at the beginning and end of this chapter. See if you can spot it. It tells us the primary function of this city. Verse 1.

Verse 1. Arise, shine, for your light has come. Verse 3. Nations will come to your light.

[1 : 4 6] Verse 19. The Lord will be your everlasting light. Verse 20. Again. The Lord will be your everlasting light.

The most significant feature of this city is that it is a city of light. This is a city of light.

I think we'd all agree, wouldn't we, that light is pretty good. There's a reason half of the UK disappears to the Canaries over winter.

We all rejoice when the clocks go forward, when the days stretch. No one likes going to work in the dark and coming home in the dark. But light isn't just nice, is it?

Light is essential. Because without light, there is no life. I was reading, it's quite a few weeks ago now, but a book, and there was a chapter in it about the various crises that Western Europe faced in the 14th century.

[2 : 5 6] It's as interesting as it sounds. But it really was an awful century. Right? Truly, if you think going through COVID and a cost of living crisis are bad, it's time to start counting your blessings.

Because this was a truly miserable century. And one of the periods that this book focused on was the great famine of the 1310s.

It was a five-year famine. Five years. In which there were points where Edward II, the King of England, couldn't find bread to eat. There was a five-year famine caused, they think, by the eruption of a volcano in New Zealand.

That caused just a thin layer of ash to encircle the entire globe. You could still see. Absolutely fine.

Sunlight still came through. But it's enough just to block a tiny little bit of sunlight. Enough to lower the temperatures just a little so that plant life suffocated.

[4 : 08] Crops failed. And people starved. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives. All because a tiny little bit less of light was getting through the normal.

I don't doubt it. We all take it for granted. We are incredibly dependent on light. And we just assume it will always be there for us.

But without it, life wouldn't last long at all. Light isn't an optional extra for human existence, is it?

It is essential for life. And that is something we see right through the Bible. If you go to Genesis 1, the very first thing that is created.

There is light before there is life. It is the foundation from which the earth is filled with plants and animals and people. In the opening verses of John's gospel, we are introduced to the light of the world.

[5 : 21] Jesus Christ. Not the light of the world because he makes things nice. But the light of the world because in him was life.

Jesus was the light because Jesus was life. He is the giver of life and the redeemer of life.

And because of that, he is the light of the world. Light is life. So there are two key metaphors going on in this chapter, aren't there?

The city and the light. There is the city which is you, the people of God, the church. And there is light which is life.

The city which is you and the light which is life. And the unmistakable point being made here in this chapter is that the city is a city of light.

[6 : 31] You can do the maths, right? That means the church, you, gathered here this morning. You are the beacon of light, the fountain of life in this world.

That is no small thing, is it? But don't just take my word for it. Because it is exactly what Jesus says to his disciples on the Sermon on the Mount.

Those famous chapters in Matthew's Gospel. Where Jesus is teaching his disciples, right? He's speaking to the people who have chosen to follow him.

And he turns to them and says in verse 14 of Matthew 5. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Pretty sure he had Isaiah 60 in mind there. When he said those words to his disciples, listen again to what he says. You are the light of the world.

[7 : 43] A city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. That is the disciples of Jesus. That is us here this morning.

We are part of a city that must shine. Because the light has come amongst us. And that light shines into a world of darkness.

Look at verse 2 with me. Darkness covers the earth. There is darkness everywhere. But to you, to the city of God, the church of Christ, to you the light has come.

And his glory will be seen upon you. That is the church. That is you sitting here on a Sunday morning.

You are the light of the world. The only hope of life. shining out into a world of darkness. It can be easy, can't it, to be very unimpressed by the church.

[8 : 56] People you look around the room and think it's not the most inspiring bunch of folk you'll ever see. Someone at work or at university or at school asks you what you did at the weekend.

And you say, I went to the beach on Saturday, had a nice meal with some friends. Went to church. Did you see the football on Sunday afternoon?

As if it's this thing that you best not make a big deal of. Because it's a little embarrassing. And you don't want people asking too many questions about it.

I think it's pretty uncontroversial. It's a little bit of a big deal to suggest we should see the church the same way Jesus sees the church. Jesus says you are the light of the world.

And so only in the church is there life. Because this is Christ's church. And there is no life apart from him.

[10 : 06] This is where he is. Not in this building, but amongst you. He is the light that has come to us.

He is the light that shines into the darkness and overcomes it. But you, you are the people in which Christ shines. You, the church, are the only people living in the world who can point to the true, everlasting, eternal life.

Because the only true light of the world has come to you. The same Jesus who says, I am the light of the world. turns to his disciples and says, you are the light of the world.

Because he has entrusted us with the task of making him known. Of making sure the people living in the darkness around us have no choice, but to see the light shining forth.

That is our calling. As the city of God, you are a city set on a hill. You are a beacon of light in a world of hopelessness.

[11 : 18] Remember that. The next time someone asks you what you did at the weekend. Remember that. Remember that. The next time someone asks you why you're a Christian. They might, they might well sneer at first, but the truth is they are living in a dark world.

With no hope of life. And into that darkness, they should, they must, they must see the light of God's city shining forth.

Remember your calling, whatever it looks like through the week, at the weekend. Don't be afraid, but feel compelled to give people no choice, but to see the light. Give them the chance to come to it.

It is part of your calling, as the city of God, to arise and shine, because in you is the light of the world.

So stop one is the light of the city. And the light is marvelous, but there is, there is much more to see. Our second stop, we're going to travel up to a high point in the city, a vantage point from which you can see everything that is going on.

[12 : 39] And when you look across the city, right to the walls, to the coast, you see that this city is full of people. It is alive. It is beautiful.

It is thriving. It is a great place to be a part of. Look at verse five with me. Then you will look and be radiant.

Your heart will throb and swell with joy. Why? Why? Look at the end of verse nine. Because God has endowed you with splendor.

This city is a beautiful city. It is a beautiful city. And when you look around, you'll see why. Look at the images that Isaiah uses here.

The nations are bringing in their riches and treasures through the gates and into the heart of the city. The camels of Midian and Ephah.

[13 : 38] Here come the people of Sheba, bringing their gold and incense. The rams of Nebaioth are here, verse seven. And they're all coming to adorn, to make beautiful God's dwelling place, his city.

The ships are coming into the port from Tarshish, and they are laden with silver and gold. There are people from near and far working on the beautiful walls, rejoicing together as they build them.

The juniper, the fir, and the cypress trees of Lebanon are all coming in, arriving in their masses. Instead of bronze, there is gold. Instead of iron, there is silver. This city is absolutely beautiful.

It is full of all the most precious things. Remember, this is the church.

This is you. You might be sitting there thinking, I can't remember the last time I saw a camel in church. But this imagery is pointing to something more than outward beauty, isn't it?

[14 : 46] A few chapters earlier in Isaiah, we read about the suffering servants. A series of songs prophesying the coming of Christ.

And in Isaiah 53, we read that he had no outward beauty that we should desire. And yet he was the most beautiful, glorious person to have ever lived.

It might not always look the most glamorous, but the church is the one place in the world, the one place in the world where you will find people who are being renewed into the image of a servant, in the image of God.

If you think Jesus is beautiful, then let me tell you, there is no more beautiful place on earth than his church. Because this is the one place where you will find beauty like that.

Because here, people are being renewed in righteousness and holiness. Only here are people being sanctified, growing in love, in patience, in kindness, and humility.

[15 : 59] It can be very easy, kind of, to focus on the imperfections of church life, of which there are many.

But the city of light, the bride of Christ, is a beautiful place. It is a beautiful place, because this is a place of love and kindness, of compassion and grace, of forbearance and forgiveness.

It's not, that's not something you're going to find down at Cataudry on a Saturday afternoon. It's something you will only find in the church, and it is becoming more and more beautiful.

God is making ever more beautiful his already beautiful city. So enjoy it. Rejoice in it. Be thrilled and exult. Let your heart throb and swell with joy, that you are part of this city, because it is a place that God has made beautiful.

Be excited about seeing people every week, who are not like the rest of the world. We see that the city of light is a beautiful city, but we're going to come down now, from our vantage point at the top of the city, and go right to the edge.

[17 : 30] We're going down to the city walls, and down to the city gates, because if you look there, these walls aren't being built to keep people out.

Look at verse 11 with me. Your gates will stand open. They will never be shut, day or night.

Look at the gates, and you will see them wide open. They don't shut, and they cannot shut. The city of God, the church, is open always to everyone.

That is both a command we must hear, and an invitation, to any who remain in the darkness outside. This is an overwhelmingly beautiful chapter, but there is a very solemn warning, right at the heart of it.

Verse 12, for the nation or kingdom, that will not serve you, will perish. It will be utterly ruined.

[18 : 46] This is a city of life, because it is built on Jesus, who is the cornerstone. It is a city of light, because it is a place through which Jesus, the light of the world, shines into darkness.

The gates are open. But if you want life, you must come in. You must be coming, because this is where Jesus is.

And there is no hope in life. There is no light in the darkness. There is no city in the wilderness, apart from in and through Jesus. The church is beautiful, and the gates are open.

Hear the call of Jesus, to repent and believe in him, and come in to his beautiful city. This is also an important reminder, isn't it, to those of us inside the city too.

We must hear the call, to keep wide open, the gates. Because we, we might not think we're closing them, but it's so easy, isn't it, when someone shows up, who we don't quite know what to do with, to find ourselves just creaking shut the door a little.

[20 : 17] Every church will have a, a kind of dominant demographic, and that's, that's okay. That's good. But what happens, when someone different shows up?

Someone who doesn't quite fit the pattern. Doesn't fit in with the crowd. Would someone who doesn't fit in, according to the standards of society out there?

Would they feel at home amongst you? Would they feel welcome to come in? Would they look at this church, that is you, not the building.

Would they look at this church, and know they are welcome amongst you? Would they know that you want them to come in? The job of the gatekeepers in this city, is not to keep people out.

It is to beckon people in, to say to the passerby, the gates are open, and they are open for you. All the things that divide people out there, none of it should be in here.

[21 : 34] That's why Paul says again and again, through his epistles, here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, city and slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

When you see someone amongst you, maybe even this morning, who you don't know, and you'd never normally talk to, and you know they're new, and you look at them, you know exactly what I mean, I've been there myself, you look at them and you hope someone else will go and speak to them.

Because it makes you feel a little uncomfortable. Go. Go and speak to them. Make sure they know they are welcome here.

That you want them to be here. Don't be weird about it. But make sure that everyone who comes amongst the people of this church, that they know the gates of this city are wide open.

We've seen the light of the city, the beauty of the city, the gates of the city. The last place I want to stop is the planning department.

[22 : 54] A letdown at the end, isn't it? We've seen that this city is beautiful, but the materials are still coming in. The city is not yet finished.

The gates are still open, and there are people being welcomed in every day. The city is great, but it is changing. But we see in this chapter that while the city is not finished, there is a model we can go and see.

A blueprint of the plans of what this city will one day be. And it is beautiful. It is great now.

But one day it will be perfect. Look at verse 18. No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls salvation.

And your gates praise. Verse 20. The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

- [24 : 17] The future of this city is a perfect future of perfect peace, of a harmony, of a joy, of an exaltation that we can only imagine in the present.
- The church is beautiful, but one day, one day it will be perfect. One day the light will shine forth in all its glory. One day we won't just be a little more kind than we used to be.
- We'll be as kind as we ever could be, and so will everyone around us. And we will enjoy the city as it was meant to be enjoyed. So we saw a glimpse of in Revelation 21 that we read earlier, of the perfected city of God, beautifully adorned.
- That is the living hope that we have. That is the inheritance that we have been guaranteed. The whole church and all creation will be made perfect.
- So keep your mind on the future of this city, in the struggles of day-to-day life. Set your mind on it, because that is home.
- [25 : 48] I'm going to think a little more about that this evening. But that is where you belong. And so it's not only okay, it is good and right that we long for it.
- That we look forward to it. To a city of joy. Where there'll be no more pain, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more suffering. A perfect city to enjoy forever and ever.
- That is the salvation that Jesus has secured for you. And he has done it to display and reflect his own beauty.
- The whole church and all creation will be made perfect and it will display the beauty of God. That's a fitting and right place to end.
- Isn't it? Because it's not about us. Look at the end of verse 21. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor.
- [27 : 04] The Lord does all this for the display of Christ's splendor. He makes us beautiful so the whole world will display his beauty.
- The city is the light of the world, but only because it is built on the cornerstone of Christ. The city is beautiful, but only because it is full of people being made into the likeness of Jesus.
- The city is open, but only because the gates have been opened with the blood of Jesus. The city will be perfect, but only because Jesus is growing it with his own hands.
- The city is great. The church is amazing. It is a privilege. It is a privilege to shine the light we have been given. It is a beautiful place, open to all, looking forward to perfected future, but it is only any of those things, and it is all of those things because of Jesus.
- The light of the world. The life of the world. Our Savior and Redeemer who is building his city and will come back for his own praise be to Jesus.
- [28 : 29] For all this city is, and all that it is to do, is to show how beautiful he is. Let me pray.
- Father, we praise you for your beautiful bride. We thank you for the light of the world who has come amongst us.
- We pray that we would let that light shine out into the darkness. We thank you for the beauty of the suffering servant.
- And we pray that we would be made more and more into his likeness. We thank you that you have opened the gates of this city that all who hear your call might come in.
- Help us to keep those gates wide open. We thank you for the future of a perfect city we have to look forward to. Help us to hold fast to that hope.
- [29 : 49] Many struggles of day-to-day life in a broken and sinful world. But we praise you most of all that this is all for Jesus. That it is for his glory and his splendor.
- May we make his name great here in this place and forevermore. In his most precious name we pray.

Amen.