

The Blessed Harvest **Isaiah 27:2-13**

Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah chapter 27, starting at verse 2, reading through to the end of the chapter, verse 13. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please do join me in prayer. Father in heaven, as we come now to hear your word read, I ask, Father, that we would be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 27, starting at verse 2: "In that day, 'A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! ³I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; ⁴I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briers to battle! I would march against them, I would burn them up together. ⁵Or let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me.'

"⁶In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.

"⁷Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them? Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain? ⁸Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them; he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east wind. ⁹Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing. ¹⁰For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness; there the calf grazes; there it lies down and strips its branches. ¹¹When its boughs are dry, they are broken; women come and make a fire of them. For this is a people without discernment; therefore he who made them will not have compassion on them; he who formed them will show them no favor.

"¹²In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel. ¹³And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem." Amen. May God bless that word to us.

This section of Isaiah, this portion of songs, speaking of God's judgment, of God's enacting of both covenant curses and covenant blessings, started back at Isaiah chapter 24. In chapter 24, verses 5 to 7, we read: "⁵The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left. ⁷The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh."

Even the grape vines are mourning, languishing, singing a lament. There is no joy. Why? Because mankind has broken the covenant, the everlasting covenant. And those of you who are here, I hope you remember that we talked about the fact that when God created humanity, and He set mankind in the Garden, Adam and Eve were there in a covenant relationship, and that

covenant is called “the Covenant of Works.” It was conditional. Adam had promises. There was a promise that if he broke the covenant by eating of the forbidden fruit, there would be death—death for him. And that death would be for him and for all his offspring. He was the head of humanity at that time.

Implied in a promise, or a curse of death for disobedience, there is obviously a promise of life for obedience. Adam not only had the promise of death, he had the promise of life. If he had passed that time of testing, there’s the promise that Adam would have gone on into a deeper, a greater—possibly we could use the phrase, as we use it today—an eternal life, a life in the very presence of God, a life of blessing lived forever in the presence of God.

But we know that Adam and Eve broke the covenant, that they brought a curse upon all of the earth. And yet, in Isaiah chapter 24, if you remember, the last verse finish with the words, “The LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.” It finishes with a promise.

The songs continue in Isaiah chapter 25, verses 6 to 9. We read: “⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.”

The promise is that God’s people will be gathered to a place that is called “God’s mountain,” and there in the presence of God, God’s people will feast. Think back to what I just read from Isaiah chapter 24. There, there was no wine. The wine mourns, the vine languishes, there was no celebration, there was no rejoicing, there was no feasting.

Come along to Isaiah chapter 25, and you get a promise. God is going to gather His people into His presence on His holy mountain, and there they will feast, and there they will drink the very best of wine—aged and well-refined. And God will swallow up death forever, and God’s people will rejoice.

In Isaiah chapter 26, we read of a city, a strong city, set up with salvation as its walls and bulwarks, with open gates—open to a righteous nation that keeps faith—this city where God’s people once again are gathering into the presence of God, living before God and rejoicing in His presence. The final two verses of chapter 26 speak of a Passover event, a great Passover event.

If you remember back to last week, we looked at the fact that Isaiah 26, verses 20 and 21, refer us back to the Flood—God closed the doors behind Noah; and also refer us back to the Passover, literally, with the words “until the fury has passed by,” in verse 20, which could easily have been until the fury has passed over. God promised that there would be a hiding place for His people when His judgment falls upon the earth, and that His people would be safe. And when His judgment falls, the Leviathan, the fleeing serpent—looking at chapter 27:1, Leviathan, serpent, dragon—would be slain. God’s enemies would be slain.

Well our passage this morning continues to speak of the removal of the covenantal curses that have fallen upon the earth and upon humanity, due to sin. They continue to speak of God restoring and blessing His people. Looking in chapter 27, verses 2 to 6. The subheading in my notes is “The Vineyard of Blessing.”

Think about this vineyard. If you remember, and it was a fair way back now, but if you remember, and you want to just quickly turn there, back to Isaiah chapter 5, God described a certain vineyard—a vineyard that was most disappointing. Isaiah chapter 5, starting at verse 1:

“¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.” It yielded wild grapes.

“³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? “⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. “⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”

And now if you would just turn back again to Isaiah chapter 27, and hear this song of a vineyard, and hear the difference. Isaiah 27, verse 2: “In that day, ‘A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! ³ I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; ⁴ I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briars to battle! I would march against them, I would burn them up together.’”

You see the judgments, the curses on that vineyard, that nation, have been removed. They’ve been lifted. Isaiah speaks of a restoration, or he speaks of a new planting, a new vineyard, a vineyard where the Lord Himself is its keeper. Every moment, He waters it. Every moment He waters it. I think that’s meant to cast our minds back into Genesis chapter 2, verses 5 to 10, where the Garden of Eden is described as a place that is well-watered. Every night, mist rises up from the earth to water that Garden, and from Eden flows a river—such a mighty river that it divides into four other rivers, the implication being that all the world was being watered from the Garden of Eden.

Well now, God has taken this picture of a vineyard, the vineyard that He once judged and destroyed, and now He’s restoring it, and He waters it every moment lest anyone punish it. Hear verse 4. God says, “⁴ I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briars to battle!” He’s so pleased with this vineyard, He’s so pleased with the people of the vineyard, He has no anger with them. He’s saying, basically, “Let an enemy come forth. Let someone come forth and approach my people. Let someone come and attempt to curse my vineyard, and I myself will go out against them. I myself, their God, will fight upon their behalf.”

How much does God love this place? How much does He love this vineyard? He says that He Himself will fight against them. He will burn up their enemies together. And once again, it's the language of curses removed. You go back to Isaiah chapter 5 and the song of the vineyard, and what did God say? He's going to abandon it to brambles, briars, thorns. You go back into Genesis in chapter 3, where the man had sinned, and what had God told Adam? "I have cursed the earth because of you. And when you work it, it will bring up thorns, thistles. By the sweat of your brow, you will labour for food, and yet the earth that you are working will not bring up the food that you want. It will bring up weeds."

And yet here, in Isaiah chapter 27, we see that God has blessed this place. He has blessed this vineyard. He almost wants enemies to come out so that He can show His people just what it is that He's going to do with them, just how He's going to deal with those who attack this precious place that God has set up, this place that He loves, that He watches over with such care, this vineyard that to God is a joyous and beautiful.

And yet, verse 5, speaking of these thorns and briars, "Or let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me." In other words, repentance is available to His enemies. Those whom He would destroy and judge for attacking His vineyard, those whom He would throw into the fire, should they come seeking protection, should they come seeking God's help, should they come repentantly to God—He will make peace with them. He will let them make peace with Himself. He's willing to receive them.

Let's keep reading our way forward. Verse 6: "In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit." We often forget, as we read our Old Testaments, that in establishing the nation of Israel, the theocracy of Israel, one of God's intentions was that the theocracy, the nation of Israel, was to be a witness to the whole world. The whole world was to look upon that nation and see the goodness of God, see His justice, see His mercy, see the goodness of their laws.

The whole world was to be called to repentance by the presence of God among His chosen people. And they failed. They did not witness, if you want to put it that way, to the whole world. They fell to their sins. The whole world ended up laughing at them. They became a byword and a curse among the nations through their sin. But "in days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit."

Fill the *world* with fruit. I want us to think about that. We've already read from Colossians chapter 1 and verse 6, the apostle Paul saw that being fulfilled in his lifetime. He saw the gospel being preached out to the whole world. He saw the fruit of the gospel in the repentance of the Gentiles, the world over. The apostle Paul looked at the progress of God's kingdom through the preaching of the gospel, and he thought to himself, "God's will is being done here. God's vineyard is bearing fruit. The nations are being called to repentance."

This picture of a vineyard, it's a potent scriptural picture. It's one that's picked up in the Scripture in other places. Turn quickly to the gospel of John chapter 15. What does Jesus say of Himself?

“¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

“I am the true vine,” says Jesus. “I am God’s planted vine. I am the vine that God loves, the vine that’s going to produce this wine of celebration, this wine of rejoicing, this fruit that God wants to send out into all the world.”

Stay there in John chapter 15, and just move down to verse 16. Jesus speaking, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” Do you see what He’s saying to the apostles, or to the disciples at that moment? He’s saying, “I am the vine, and I will bear fruit. You are also going to be vines, and you will bear fruit. As I am, you will become. I will make you something. I am going to make you like myself. I am the one true fruitful vine, God’s blessed vine. I am the one that has been waited for. In me, you shall become like me. You shall bear fruit, as I have borne fruit.”

What would that fruit be? The preaching of the gospel, the truth, the word of truth, God’s word of salvation—salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, the escape from the curses, the judgments, the covenantal judgments of God that fall upon the whole earth. And yet Jesus tells us that we, being in Him, become like Him. We become vines that bear fruit in the whole earth.

And so I ask you, my friends, where is this vineyard? What is this vineyard? What does the vineyard of the Lord look like? It looks like His church, the world over. It looks like His faithful people, the world over, preaching the gospel to the nations. It looks like His church—people like us. We’re this blessed vineyard of God, bearing fruit in the nations. We are in Christ. We are in Christ.

Think of the things that Paul teaches in Ephesians. Think of the fact that we are taught in the book of Ephesians that He is the head, we are the body. And go on into Ephesians chapter 2—He, from all the world, has called us, separated people, and made them one. One nation, one body, one vine, one true Israel, Paul says—one true commonwealth, one true people under Christ, in Christ, one true body. So Isaiah speaks to us of this blessed vine that spreads through the whole world, filling it with fruit.

There’s this great time lapse-type video, I think computer graphic generated, that you can find on the Internet. It’s a laid-out map of the world, sort of typical flat, two-dimensional idea of the world—all the continents are there. And what it is, it’s a video of the development of God’s church throughout the world. And you watch it, and you’ve got a timeline running and it comes to 33 A.D., and you get this little flash of red at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Then the

flash of red gets bigger, and then it gets bigger, and then it contracts a little, and then it gets bigger, and then it gets bigger.

And what it's showing is, historically, how the gospel spread throughout the world, how God's word spread throughout the world. By the time it gets to our day, there's flashes of red on every inhabited continent—Asia, South America, North America, Australia, Europe. There are flashes of red, and some of them are quite red, because there the gospel has penetrated quite deeply, and some of them are pink. But you just see that over time, God's church has grown and grown and grown. It's filling the world—filling the world with believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, filling the world with the fruit that God seeks—fruit of life, blessed fruit, fruit that is not cursed, fruit that is called on and on, into eternal life.

The next division I've put in our reading, or portion this morning, is verses 7 to 11. Verses 7 to 11 are a little difficult. Here we have a section of covenantal discipline being used to separate and to purify God's people. Let's have a look at it. It starts off with a question. The question asked is, “⁷Has he,” that would be speaking of God, “struck them,” speaking of His people, “as he struck those who struck them? Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?”

What's Isaiah saying? What's the point here? He's saying, “Look at the world. Look around. Look at God's people. Yes, God has judged His people for their sins. Yes, God has disciplined His people. But has He struck them in the same way that He struck the nations around them? Has He destroyed His people?” No, He hasn't. Has He slain them as He slayed those who were their slayers? No, He hasn't. And Isaiah is speaking not only of what was happening at that moment, but on and into the future.

What's he saying? He's saying that though God's hand of discipline falls upon His nation, and now we the church are His nation, He never judges us as He judges those who are His enemies. His judgment upon His people is discipline. It's for the purpose of discipline. It's for the purpose of correction. It's for the purpose of purification. His judgment upon His people is to make His people grow, and to purify His church.

So Isaiah says, “⁷Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them? Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain? ⁸Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them; he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east wind.” He's saying that when God sent the people off to Babylon, He was actually protecting His nation. The Moabites were judged; they're to be destroyed, for example. The Assyrians were judged; they're to be destroyed, finished, gone. The Babylonians will be judged; they're to be destroyed, finished, and gone. But God's people are being preserved, even in a place like Babylon. Even in exile, He's preserving His people, and His judgment is there to purify them.

Verse 9: “Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin.” If there's one thing the people of Israel did not fall back into when they came back from the Babylonian captivity, it was idolatry. No longer were they tempted by the Baals. No longer were they tempted by the Asherah. No longer were they tempted by Molech.

They cast off their idolatry. They were held captive in a nation full of idols, and from that nation full of idols, those who returned had learned to be revolted by the idols which they saw. God used the captivity to purify His people.

Continuing in verse 9: “When he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.” You see what Isaiah’s saying. He’s saying that when God’s people have finally learnt not to follow after idols, all of the things that were involved in that idolatrous worship will be as nothing, they’ll be as dust, they’ll be ground as powder on the ground. They’ll be worth nothing. They’ll mean nothing to them.

Reading on in verse 10: “For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken.” Now I will tell you that if you want to read ten different commentators, you’ll get ten different answers as to what Isaiah is saying here. My reading of it is that God is speaking of the city of Jerusalem, and He’s saying that Jerusalem was crushed, punished, rejected for its sins and its idolatry. It became a place where animal graze. It came a place where poor people gathered firewood—that great city where the temple of God was.

Now why do I say it’s Jerusalem? Looking down into verse 11, God says, “For this is a people without discernment; therefore he who made them will not have compassion on them; he who formed them will show them no favor.” Remember the message of Isaiah is this: God’s judgment will fall upon the sinful nation of Israel, it will fall upon the sinful nation of Judah. But from that nation, He will save a remnant.

And so it’s often a case of trying to understand what is being spoken of here. I think what’s being spoken of here is God’s judgment over all of Jerusalem. God says of those people, “This is a people without discernment.”

Turn very quickly to Deuteronomy chapter 32. Moses is speaking of the people of Israel. I just want to look at verse 28. Deuteronomy 32, verse 28: “For they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them.” It’s a similar phrase, there’s similar words in the background there. They are a nation void of counsel, a people without discernment, as Isaiah says.

I think here, therefore, that God is actually speaking of that nation of Judah, of that city of Jerusalem, and He’s saying that His judgment will fall upon them. And upon those who are not of His elect remnant, that judgment falls. He will not have compassion on them. He will show them no favour. It’s a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Consider Isaiah 5 very quickly. We looked at the passage concerning the vineyard. Turn back again to Isaiah chapter 5, and hear what God says, speaking to His nations, speaking to this nation of Judah. Verse 20: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” Down to verse 24: “Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

And so I believe here that Isaiah is basically speaking again of exactly the same group of people—those who are people without discernment, those who will not choose between good and evil. And in their choosing, they always choose evil, and they always follow after evil. They're always willing to compromise. They're always trying to find a way not to follow the words of the living God—a church filled with compromise.

Now that doesn't sound applicable to today, does it? Or does it? How many churches are there where the gospel's not preached? How many churches are there where the Scriptures are not treated with the reverence with which they should be treated because they are the very word of God? How many churches are there today that are supporting the supposed marriage-equality campaign? How many places are there where wolves in sheep's clothing stand behind a pulpit and encourage people to sin? It's heartbreaking, but our nation is filled with them. God will not have compassion on them. The day will come, there's a price to be paid, and they will pay the price. I say again, it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Our final section, chapter 27, verse 12: ¹²“In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel.” What an interesting phrase. That word there translated in the ESV “gleaned,” is suggesting that God is going to seek out His people from among the nations the way a starving widow, or the way a beggar would seek out grain, one at a time, when they were gleaning a field after the harvest.

You go back into the law in the book of Leviticus, and God tells His people that they're not to go over a field the second time. They're to leave what is left behind for the poor people to come and glean. You think of the book of Ruth, when Ruth returned back to the Promised Land with her mother-in-law, Naomi, she went gleaning. She went behind the harvesters, looking for the little bits and pieces that had been dropped here and there, looking for food.

And here the Scripture tells us that one by one, God is going to glean for His people. Such care, such personal involvement. One by one, God is seeking those that are His. Like a poor person seeking their tiny little morsel of food, God's attention upon all the world is so close, so discriminative, so detailed that He's gleaning for people from among all the nations—dragging them in, one by one—one by one.

How do you change a nation? One by one. How could Australia be turned around from its current headlong rush into destruction? One by one, one by one, one conversion at a time, one person called to repentance at a time. Don't be without hope, all right? You hear that, and you think, Could it possibly ever happen? It seems that all we've seen for years and years is decline, decline, decline—the church shrinks, shrinks, shrinks. Few people turn up to hear the word.

I once again remind you. Go back—go back to the eighteenth century, go back to the early 1700s, go back to Great Britain before the Great Awakening, before God sent forth one man—George Whitfield. Whitfield. One man. One poor man. He worked his way through university as what they called a “servitor.” That basically means he couldn't pay the fees. He was the shoe-polisher. He was the servant of all, and he worked his way through university as the servant of all.

And on his way through university, Whitfield was converted. And he came out of university a bright and burning flame for the gospel. You could say he set fire to the nations, both Great Britain and North America. Everywhere he went, people gathered by the thousands to hear this preacher. And they were converted in their thousands, and others were converted.

And there were other preachers—the Wesley brothers; not as strong in their theology as Whitfield, but they were great preachers of the gospel. The Wesley brothers, Hal Harris, other men—men in North America, like Jonathan Edwards, the Tennent brothers. God can turn the world on its head, if He so desires. And we're encouraged by Scripture to believe He is gracious and merciful, showing steadfast love to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.

When Jonah was sent to that nation of Nineveh, do you know why he didn't want to go? Remember what he said, "You're a merciful God, showing steadfast love to thousands." Jonah remembered the promises of God and said, "I don't want to see them enacted upon the Ninevites, because I hate them!" But he ends up preaching to the Ninevites, and the whole city repents.

We doubt the power of the Spirit of God. We doubt the power of the gospel of God. Our memories are too short. Our vision is too narrow. We imagine that it can't happen, and that it can't be done, and that judgment must be sure and destruction must be coming. Well, I'll speak to you in human terms. Unless God intervenes, judgment must be sure and destruction must be coming. That's the way it is.

But Scripture encourages us to believe that God can intervene, and that He is merciful, and that He shows steadfast love to thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sins. And if God draws thousands back into His church, back to His word, back to His gospel, He will turn the nation around. He will turn the nation around. And He can do it, and for Him that is so easy.

He is the sovereign, Almighty God. Mercy for Him, the power of calling people into the church for Him, is no more difficult than it was on the day when He said, "Let there be light." It's the power of a God who by the very power of His words creates. By the very power of His will, He upholds. By the very power of His Holy Spirit, my friends, He can call nations to repentance—people in their thousands, one by one. One by one.

And what is the means by which He will accomplish His ends? It's a very ordinary looking means. This is the miracle of the works of God, and the sovereignty of God. What are the means which God has appointed for the calling of people to repentance? Average Joe, average Mary, average people like you and me, living in obedience to His will, sharing the good news, speaking the truth, speaking the truth in love, sharing the gospel.

It's the power, as Paul tells us in Second Corinthians, that is hidden. The jewels, the glory is hidden in clay pots. And we're clay pots. If you don't know it, clay pots had a particular use in Paul's time. Our grandmothers might have called them "night pots." Leave it there. And Paul tells us that God hides His glory in jars of clay—people like you and I. And this glory is His power of salvation, reaching out into all the nations.

My friends, we're part of this venue that's to fill all the earth with fruit. And that fruit is repentant sinners, called into the kingdom of God. That's what God is seeking through His church by the means of our obedience. And we need the help of the Holy Spirit to do it. We need not to be fearful. We need to have a bold and holy love for people, and you only get that through the power of the Holy Spirit. You only get that through the very work of God Himself.

We should be asking for it, and we should be praying about this. We should be praying that God will call people to repentance, and that God will use us to do it. And then on the back of that prayer life, do it! You're praying for something, you want God to do something—we don't expect Him to do it over there, and don't expect it to happen off in the clouds. If what you want to happen and what you're praying for is to be done, the next logical step is to think: And I am to do it. I am to obey.

God might never send another preacher like Whitfield into the world. He might, and He might not. That's according to His sovereign will. And for all the good that Whitfield did, and for all the mighty power of His preaching, you put a preacher like Whitfield next to what God accomplishes through the many thousands of His people just obeying in their humble way, day by day by day, Whitfield adds up to actually nothing. We look at him as a hero, and to me he certainly is. There's no one I enjoy reading more about in modern church history than George Whitfield. We look to him as a hero. But the point of the matter is that God does more every day through the simple, humble obedience of His people—every day. He gleans, one by one.

Last verse: ¹³“And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.”

Isaiah keeps coming back to this gathering on the holy mountain. It started back in Isaiah chapter 2. He mentions it again in Isaiah chapter 4, and in Isaiah chapter 24, Isaiah chapter 25, and now Isaiah chapter 27—this gathering on the mountain, this gathering of God's people upon the holy mountain. In Scripture we're told that that is yet to come. It's happening now, and it will be ultimately fulfilled in the future.

I make the point again, and I know I've made it many times, but understand something. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John tells us that his feet were placed upon a high mountain, and when they were placed upon the high mountain, that's when he could see the city of God descending to the earth. That's when he could see the church being brought into being, the church being born out of heaven and delivered to the earth, when he was upon that high mountain. And it's happening and it will happen in the future, and we will come to an ultimate fulfillment.

Glorious things of Thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God. That city set upon a mountain, that city—and I'm speaking in future terms here, I'm not speaking necessarily of Jerusalem in Israel today—that city in eschatological terms, that place where God's people meet God in the face of the Lamb, meet with God in the face of their Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and live in His presence. What a day! What a day.

My friends, we should be looking forward to this. We should be rejoicing in this. And notice that Isaiah returns to the theme that these people will be gathered from amongst the nations. God has His people in Assyria. God has His people in Egypt. God has His people in Israel. In other words, God has His people the world over.

Turn in Isaiah back to chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11 is that glorious passage. It begins, “¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.” Speaking of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; speaking of the incarnation; speaking of the fact that He ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Move forward and along to verse 10: “In that day the root of Jesse,” remember how the passage was introduced, the one who comes forth from the stump of Jesse, “who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. ¹¹ In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. ¹² He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

So when Isaiah speaks to us—you can turn back to Isaiah chapter 27—when Isaiah speaks to us and tells us that there’s going to be a day when God gathers the people from lands like Assyria and Egypt—those nations which are God’s enemies, those nations which are set down for destruction—what is He wanting us to understand? He wants us to understand that people are going to be called into His kingdom by His Messiah, by that root from the stump of Jesse, the branch from his roots that bears fruit. They’re going to be called back into, or called into His nation through the works and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the salvation that can only be found in the Saviour whom God has sent forth, through the salvation that can only be found in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is gathering a people to Himself from all the nations. The gospel goes out into all the world. And even those who are our enemies, among our enemies there are His elect. The apostle Paul himself was a great example of this. Remember, he was a murderer of Christians, a hater of the church. He felt convinced that in destroying the church, he was serving God. And God called him into the church. God sent forth His effective call and called that man into the church.

Even amongst our enemies in the nations today, we can only therefore assume that God has His elect—people to be called into salvation. People who at this moment think the church ought to be destroyed, for all we know, in the next moment, God is going to turn them into Christians, and probably better and stronger Christians than you and I!

My friends, God’s people should be a hopeful and joy-filled people. Don’t look at the world and imagine that God is not in control. Don’t look at what’s happening around us and imagine that God is not at this moment building His church, against which the gates of hell will not prevail. Don’t look around and imagine that God is not at this moment saving for Himself a holy nation,

who will enter into His city, where the gates are open; that God is not at this moment, for Himself building His kingdom for His glory. He is! He is!

Don't look at the world and forget that God is sovereign over all things, and even if His hand of judgment is against a nation like ours today—and it may well be, I don't claim to be a prophet, but it may well be—don't forget, the one who judges? He's merciful. The prayer of Hosea in judgment: Remember mercy. In judgment, remember mercy. Even if God is destroying this nation, and He may be, He's got His people here. He's building His church here. He's saving His people from our midst, from amongst this darkened country in which we live, where churches are closed down and other churches don't preach the gospel. Even now, God is saving His people, building His church.

That promised day is coming. That final gathering is coming. We will stand upon the mountain of the Lord. We will see His holy Jerusalem. We will see the face of our Saviour. We will live in the presence of our God. That day is coming. And in the meantime, we serve our God faithfully here, in obedience, in love, to the very best of our ability, doing all that we can. Trust in the providence of God, my friends. He has not abandoned His people. He will not. Those are His promises. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, once again we give you thanks and praise you for the riches that are to be found in your word. We give you thanks and praise you that you have shown such good things to your people, that we have such wonderful and glorious promises to cling to.

I pray, Father, that you would help us by the power of your Holy Spirit to be your obedient and fruitful people. I pray, Father, that we would see your work, that we would perceive the things that you are doing as you call peoples to repentance from throughout the world, one by one, building up your kingdom and strengthening your church for your glory. And I pray that we would give you the glory, as indeed we ought. I ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.