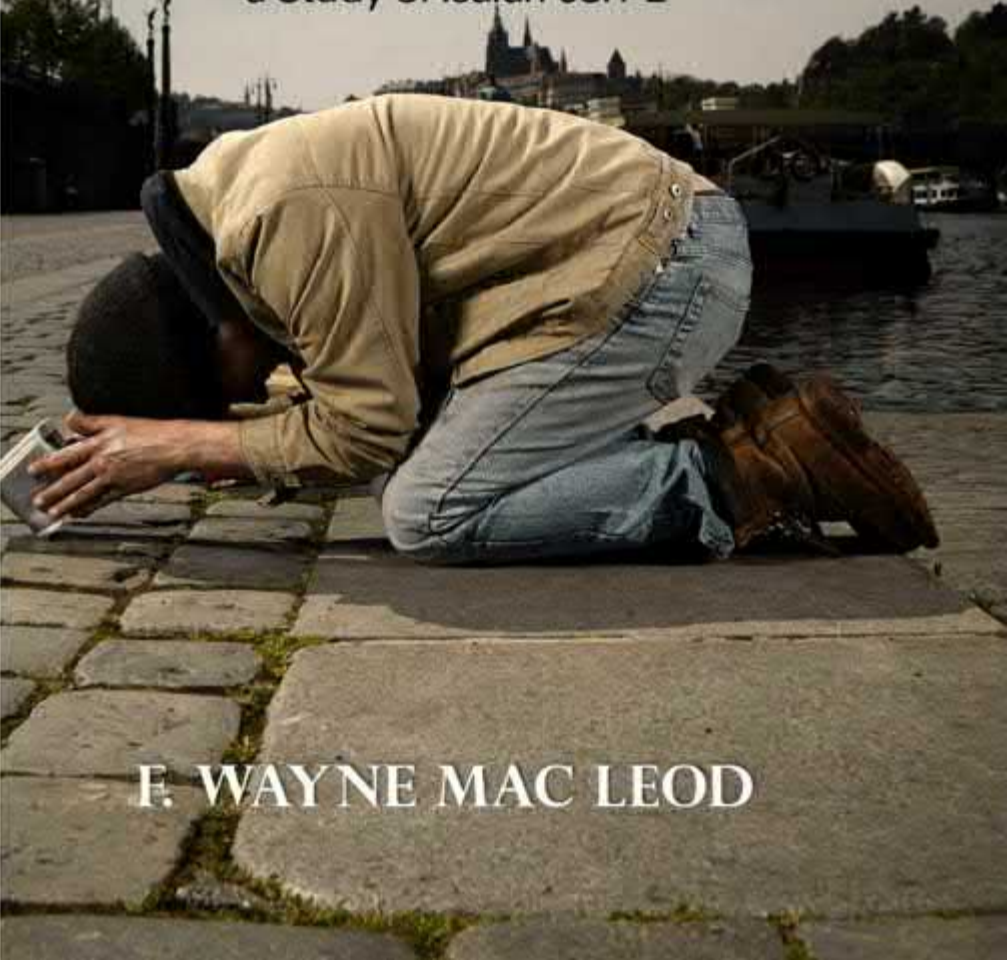


SHAKE OFF THE DUST

A Call to God's People to Take
Their Place as Children of the King:
a Study of Isaiah 53:1-2



F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Shake Off the Dust

*A Call to God's People to Take Their Place as Children of the King:
A Devotional Look at Isaiah 52:1-2*

F. Wayne MacLeod

Light To My Path Book Distribution
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Preface

As a prophet, Isaiah had the awesome privilege of speaking to whole nations on God's behalf. God revealed things to him that He shared with no one else. Sometimes the words the Lord asked him to speak were not well received. Like many prophets before and after him, Isaiah would experience rejection and criticism for what He said.

Isaiah 52:1-2 is one of those times when Isaiah was asked to share a difficult message. On that occasion, God showed him the passion He had for His people but how far short they had fallen from that purpose. As a people, Israel had failed to understand their calling. They were content with so little when God had called them to much more.

In this short study, I want to take a moment to consider the call of God on the nation of Israel in Isaiah 52:1-2. While the words are spoken to Israel, they apply to us today as well. I trust that these prophetic words of Isaiah will challenge us as the people of God to understand His purpose and stimulate us to live for the glory of His name.

F. Wayne MacLeod

Chapter 1 - Awake, Awake

(1) Awake, awake – Isaiah 52:1 ESV

Isaiah 52:1 begins with a challenge for the people of God to awake. The implication is that they were asleep. This was not a physical sleep but rather spiritual. The imagery of sleep is important in this verse. There is a world of difference between sleep and death. There is every chance of awaking from sleep, but this is not the case with death. When Isaiah called his people to awake, he shows us that this possibility still existed for the people of God.

The Nature of this Sleep

What was the nature of Israel's sleep? The sleep Isaiah refers to here is a spiritual insensitivity. The one great enemy of the guard is sleep. As long as these guards are awake, they are sensitive to what is going on around them. If the enemy should attack, they can alert the city. The city depends on the alertness of the guards and will not forgive them for falling asleep on the job. Their security depends on these guards remaining awake and sensitive to what is happening around them.

This is no less important spiritually. As believers in the Lord Jesus, we need to be constantly on guard because our enemy is very subtle. How easy it is for us to become desensitized to the evil taking place around us. Sin and false teaching have become so common that it no longer shocks or grieves us. When it enters the church, we hardly give it a second thought.

The sleep Isaiah speaks about in verse 1, however, is more than just insensitivity. It is also manifested in spiritual slackness. By slackness, I am referring to an unwillingness to do anything about the sin and error around us. Many believers know there are problems in their community and church but are unwilling to take the steps necessary to resolve those problems. They are not prepared to make the required sacrifices to correct behaviours or change their lifestyle. These believers are comfortable with

where they are and unwilling to step out of their comfort zones to make a difference.

There is a passage in Song of Solomon that has always touched me. In this passage, a young man returns from a voyage, longing to see his lover. He arrives at night but cannot wait until morning to see her. Arriving at her door, he knocks. Listen to the conversation that took place that night:

(2) I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." (3) I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them? - Song of Solomon 5:2-3 ESV

The young woman was sleeping when she heard the knock on the door. She awoke and listened to her lover calling out for her to open to him. Though she had not seen him in a while, she told him that she had just taken off her garments, washed her feet, and did not want to get them dirty again. She was comfortable in her bed. To answer the door would mean getting dressed and soiling her feet. This was just too much for her. Her bed was too comfortable for her. Spiritual sleep is evidenced in our unwillingness to sacrifice what is necessary for the Kingdom of God.

Finally, spiritual sleep is manifested in a general apathy toward God and His Kingdom. Those who are spiritually asleep do not seem to have a passion for the things of God. They know that spirituality among believers is lower than it needs to be but accept this as normal. They do not see evidence of God's presence in their church or personal lives but excuse this as a sign of the times. They watch the moral decline of our nation, but their hearts are not grieved. God seems distant, but they have no desire to cry out for His presence. They struggle with sinful attitudes in their lives but are unwilling to wrestle against their flesh to break these chains. They have settled for a weak and watered-down Christianity rendered powerless and sterile by their spiritual insensitivity, slackness, and apathy.

The Danger of this Sleep

Notice in verse 1 the repetition of the word “awake.” The word is repeated for emphasis and to underscore the importance of the command. In Isaiah 52, the prophet reminded the people of past defeats at the hands of Egypt and Assyria:

(4) For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. (5) Now therefore what have I here,” declares the LORD, “seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail,” declares the LORD, “and continually all the day my name is despised. - Isaiah 52:4-5 ESV

These verses reveal that not only was Israel oppressed by Egypt and Assyria, but the Lord’s name was despised “continually all the day” in their midst and the surrounding nations.

Israel’s sleep was not innocent. Her insensitivity, slackness and apathy resulted in her defeat and the name of the Lord God being despised all day long. How tragic it is that the God who saves us is now blasphemed because of our spiritual sleep. Listen to what the apostle Paul said to the Romans:

(24) For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” - Romans 2:24 ESV

The Lord Jesus put it this way:

(14) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. - Matthew 5:14-16 ESV

According to Jesus, God receives glory when people see our good works. We are, therefore, to be diligent in letting the light of our testimony shine in our community. We cannot sleep and shine. If we are to demonstrate our good works to the community, we must be awake and alert. The glory of God is connected to our alertness. This is not the time to allow the sleep of insensitivity, slackness and apathy to tempt us. As guards at the gate, we must battle this slumber. God is calling us to action. We must hear those words, “Awake, awake,” and take them seriously. The glory of God is at

stake. Our God must not be blasphemed and despised all day because of us. May God give us the grace to be shining lights, broadcasting His glory without ceasing until He returns.

For Prayer:

Lord God, Isaiah speaks about how Your people were asleep. We confess that we have also fallen into a sleep of spiritual insensitivity, slackness and apathy. Give us a greater willingness to sacrifice, a deeper passion for the truth and a growing desire for Your glory on this earth. Show us the need before us and stir up our hearts to action. Thank you, that rest awaits us in glory, but this is the time we need to be alert and active. We commit our nations, our churches and our families to You and pray for Your protection upon us. May we hear your call to awake from our sleep to shine brightly as Your witnesses, for these are days of intense spiritual battle.

Chapter 2 - Put on Your Strength

(1) Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion - Isaiah 52:1 ESV

In the first section of Isaiah 52:1, the Lord challenged His people to awake from their sleep. Notice, however, the next challenge in this verse: "Put on your strength, O Zion." There is a connection between the call to awake and the challenge to put on their strength. This is not the only time in Scripture that the Lord called His people to wake up and put on their strength. Consider the words of the Lord God to the church of Sardis in Revelation 3:

(2) Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. - Revelation 3:2 ESV

Notice what the Lord God said to the church of Sardis. He told them to awake and strengthen what remained and was about to die. There was an urgency to this waking up. As they slept, they were growing weaker by the moment. If they did not wake up and do something about it, they would perish.

This sleep was not innocent. As they slept, the enemy was ravaging the lives of their children and robbing them of their spiritual vitality. While they rested quietly, the enemy was very busy. The poisonous vapours of ungodliness were spreading rapidly around them, and many were succumbing to its fumes.

Countless souls were perishing, and soldiers were abandoning their posts in fear. The hurt and wounded were lacking care. There were fewer soldiers to warn the unsuspecting of danger. Many were believing the enemy's propaganda and giving up hope or surrendering. The weary were not being refreshed. There were no reinforcements to relieve those who were already overworked. Through all this, the battle only grew in intensity and violence. Thus the call goes out: "Awake, awake, put on your strength."

I am reminded of Jonah, who slept in the ship's belly during the great storm that threatened the lives of everyone on board.

(4) But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. (5) Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. - Jonah 1:4-5 ESV

The only one who had the answer to the problem the sailors experienced that day was Jonah, but with death looming shortly, he was sleeping. It took a pagan unbeliever to awaken him:

(6) So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." - Jonah 1:6 ESV

Listen to the words of Hosea concerning the people of his day:

(9) Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not. - Hosea 7:9 ESV

Hosea describes a people whose strength was being devoured by the enemy, but they did not recognize it. They did not see it because they were asleep. These people were becoming old before their time—their hairs were sprinkled with gray, but they were unaware of it. One day they woke and looked in the mirror. What a shock they had when they saw the reflection staring back at them. There looking at them in the mirror was not the young and vibrant youth they thought they were but an old man with a wrinkled face and balding gray hair bent over from the stresses and strain of life.

As they reflect on what had happened, they realize that they had become so focused on their dreams that they had been insensitive to the call of God and His warnings. They stand now before that mirror, recognizing that they have very little to show for all their years. They had not woken up from their spiritual sleep and clothed themselves with the strength their God had provided. They had not put on their armour to take a stand.

As Isaiah prophesied that day to the people of God, he challenged them to awake and put on their strength. There was a call on their lives, but they could not fulfil that call if they did not get out of their bed and step into the

battle. The strength they needed for the fight was available to them. It was theirs if they would only put it. They did not need to hide like Jonah in the bottom of the boat. They did not need to be afraid of the battle before them. There at the foot of their bed, folded up neatly and ready to put on, was all the strength and courage they needed. All that was required was the faith to clothe themselves.

The people of God in Isaiah's day were undressed and sleeping. They had not put on their strength. They did not live in the power that was available to them. They slept with the covers over their head, afraid of the enemy when they were created to be more than conquerors:

(31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? - Romans 8:31-32 ESV

(37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 8:37-39 ESV

In the Lord Jesus, we have all the strength we need to face the foe before us. Let us hear what Isaiah tells in this verse. The strength for every trial and task is already available to us, but we cannot experience it until we rise from our slumber, clothe ourselves with the strength He provides, and step out into what He has called us to do. May God give us the faith to clothe ourselves with the strength He gives to all who come to Him.

For Prayer:

Lord God, thank you for the strength to face the battle before us. We recognize that in You, we can conquer every enemy. You have given us all the armour and weapons we need for the fight. We confess, however, that all too often, we have never picked up our weapons and learned to use them. Instead of being scarred from battle, our swords are polished and sit neatly in their sheaths. God, you have given us these swords because they

are necessary for the struggle before us. Give us the courage now to draw those weapons and use them to expand and defend your church. May we clothe ourselves with the armour You have provided. Forgive us for the many times we have faced the enemy confident in our strength, only to fall. You offer us Your strength because ours is insufficient for the battle. Help us not to rely on our wisdom and effort but to trust fully in what You provide. Show us what it means to clothe ourselves with Your strength. Teach us how to tap into the resources You provide for all who belong to You.

Chapter 3 – Beautiful Garments

(1) Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. – Isaiah 52:1 ESV

In Isaiah 52:1, the Lord has been challenging His people to awake and clothe themselves with His strength. Notice, as we continue, He also calls her to put on her “beautiful garments,” reminding her that she was a holy city. Note the connection in this verse between the “beautiful garments” and the fact that she was a holy city. The verse goes on to say that nothing unclean or uncircumcised was to enter her gates anymore.

The word translated as “holy” speaks of something that has been set apart from common use for God. It can also refer to a place where God has determined to make His presence known. In this verse, both of these are true. God had set apart the inhabitants of Jerusalem for His purpose. They were to live for Him and be a light to the nations. He had also chosen to make His presence known in their midst. While this was an awesome privilege, it also brought with it great responsibility. According to Isaiah 52:1, one of those responsibilities was that she put on her beautiful garments.

The fact that God asked His people to put on her beautiful garment shows us that she was not wearing it at the time. When God commanded that nothing uncircumcised and unclean enter the city anymore, we understand that this had not always been the case. While they had been called to be holy, they had defiled themselves, offending the God who had revealed Himself in their midst.

The question we need to ask is this: What does this beautiful garment represent? To answer this in part, consider the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 61:3:

(3) to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of

righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. - Isaiah 61:3 ESV

Isaiah tells us that God wanted to give Zion a beautiful headdress to replace her ashes, gladness instead of mourning and praise instead of a faint spirit so that she would be called an oak of righteousness. In other words, God would remove the ashes of shame and sin from her head and replace them with a beautiful headdress of forgiveness and righteousness. By anointing her with the oil of His Spirit, He would fill her with a thankful and praising heart. She would be clothed with a garment of forgiveness, praise and righteousness.

The apostle John adds to our understanding of this beautiful garment when he said:

(7) Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; (8) it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. - Revelation 19:7-8 ESV

John speaks here of church as the bride of Christ being made ready for her wedding. She was clothed with fine linen, bright and pure. John goes on to tell us that this pure linen represented the righteous deeds of the saints. These deeds, of course, were an outworking of the righteousness given to her by Christ.

Consider what is happening in Isaiah 52:1. God calls out to His people and tells them to awake from their spiritual slumber and put on the strength He had given them. Israel was not just to put on His strength, however, she was also to clothe herself with a beautiful garment of forgiveness, praise and righteousness. Israel had not been dressed in this garment. She had often turned to idols and disregarded the commandments of God. While she was a child of the King, she dressed and lived like the pagan nations of her day.

If you are a child of God today, you have been set apart by God for His purpose. You have been forgiven and declared righteous by the work of the Lord Jesus. You have been given His Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of righteousness in you. The presence of God is upon you and in you. You are

not like the world. You are a child of the King, a holy child, set apart by God for Himself.

Israel, however, lived like the nations around her. She was dressed in the old rags of idolatry. She wore her grumbling like a shirt. The tattered old hat of evil and lustful thoughts sat on her head. Around her neck, like a noose, was wrapped the tie of rebellion and double-mindedness. This is how the children of God dressed. They were no different from the nations around them. That is how they wanted it. They didn't want to be different. They wanted to be just like everyone else.

Through His prophet Isaiah, however, the Lord God calls out to His people. "Put on your beautiful garment." You don't have to wear those old dirty rags anymore. Take them off and put on the beautiful garment I have prepared for you.

We have all met believers who are still clothed in those old rags of the flesh. For years they have refused to forgive those who have offended them. Some never seem to overcome anger or lust in their lives. God speaks to each of us through Isaiah 52:1, calling us to cast off the deeds and attitudes of the flesh and put on the garment of forgiveness. Clothe yourself with the mind of Christ. Let Him dress you with the fruit of His Spirit. These old rags are not only beneath your dignity as a child of God, but they offend the One who has chosen you to belong to Him.

God reminded His people that they were holy people chosen by Him. They had a responsibility to put off uncleanness and anything that defiled them:

O Jerusalem, the holy city for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. – Isaiah 52:1 ESV

These words were not only a declaration of who they were as a people but a call to vigilance. As God's children, they were to live holy lives, dressed in their beautiful garments of righteousness and praise. God had prepared a wonderful robe for them. Dressed in this robe, they would overcome the world and shine as a brilliant example of the power of God to overcome.

How are you dressed today? When people look at you, do they recognize you as a child of the King, or do they suppose you to be just like everyone else around them? Are you dressed in your beautiful robe of praise and

righteousness? He has given You a robe of righteousness. Be proud to wear it. Let everyone see that you are His.

Let me share one final thought here. Notice that the Lord calls His people to put this garment on. He has prepared it for you. It lays there at the foot of your bed. Putting this garment on, however, requires first taking off the old rags. Will you hear the Lord's call today and recognize that you are still wearing the old rags of the flesh? Will you confess this to Him and ask Him to forgive you?

Today is the day to hear the call of Isaiah 52:1—"Put on your beautiful garments." Cast off the old rags of the flesh. Don't go another day in those filthy garments. God is speaking to you right now. He is willing to forgive and clothe you with something new. You do not have to live a moment longer in those shameful robes. He has a beautiful garment for you to wear. If you belong to Him, you are a holy child, one who must awake from sleep, put on His strength and clothe yourself with the beautiful garment of forgiveness, praise and righteousness. Wear this garment proudly as a gift from your loving heavenly Father.

For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we confess that while you have given us a garment of forgiveness, praise and righteousness, we have often clothed ourselves with an angry, grumbling, and sinful spirit. There have been times when we have not forgiven our brother or sister as we should have. We have not always lived as children of God. Forgive us for not being the light and example we should be. Teach us to walk as You have called us to walk. Transform our character and help us to shine as holy lights in our community. May we wear our beautiful garments with pride.

Chapter 4 - Shake off the Dust

(2) Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; - Isaiah 52:2a ESV

Isaiah 52:2a paints a sad picture of God's people. In the last part of verse 1, the prophet challenged his people to put on her beautiful garment. Here in verse 2, he now calls her to shake off the dust and arise. I picture a beggar sitting on the dusty ground in old rags, breathing in the dust from the feet of those who pass by. It is a picture of poverty, desperation and helplessness.

Remember here that these were the children of God. He had chosen them from all other nations to be His people. She was to be a light to the nations and a reflection of the glory of her Creator. However, as we look at this verse, we have to ask ourselves how much of her Creator she reflected. What a sad picture this is. The poverty-stricken and distressed children of the King sit like beggars on the roadside, breathing in the dust from the feet of pagan passers-by. There is no reflecting light here. She is hopeless and despairing.

While she declares herself to be a child of God, she is painfully aware of her poverty. People look down on her and mock her. She has no vision. There in the dust, she has no passion for the needs of others, for she cannot seem to get past her own misery. She is despised and ridiculed by the people who pass by. Her light has gone out, and she does not reflect the glory of her heavenly Father or her true identity.

Of course, this is exactly where Satan wanted her. As long as she does not rise from the dust and take her seat, Satan had nothing to fear. As long as she was blinded to her true identity and purpose, she would never be a threat.

Some time ago, I was at a conference where the speaker shared an illustration about a believer in a prison cell. He reminded us that the door to the cell had been unlocked, and the believer was free because of the price Jesus paid on the cross. He then proceeded to ask the question:

“What keeps believers in these prison cells? Why have so many believers never experienced the victory the Lord Jesus died for them to have? He went on to tell us that one of the reasons is because they believe the lies of Satan, who stands at that door, convincing them that they can never truly expect to leave their cell and are destined to live in the dust. He blinds their eyes to the extent of Christ’s work on their behalf.

Isaiah spoke to the people of his day who sat in the dust feeling sorry for themselves. He challenged them to shake off the dusty lies of the enemy and arise. That same call goes out to us today. Yes, you are unworthy, but Christ died for you. Yes, you are weak, but God has placed His Holy Spirit to direct and empower you. Yes, you lack wisdom, but that wisdom is available to all who ask. There is no excuse for remaining in the dust. In the Lord Jesus, you are more than an overcomer (1 John 4:4; 5:4). He who has chosen you will also equip you. He has made you His child with all its rights and privileges.

The dust of discouragement, failure and hurt weigh us down and keep us from rising up. But realize that God has something more for you. He has called you to be a “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). He has chosen you to be His ambassador in a dark and dying world (2 Corinthians 5:20). You may not feel worthy of this, but by virtue of His call and equipping, you have every qualification you need. You go in His name and authority.

Isaiah urged his people to rise and be seated. God’s call was for His people to get up off the ground and take their place at the table. The Father had set a place for them, but their seat was empty. Maybe the prophet reflected on the words of the psalmist in Psalm 23 when he told his people to arise and take their seat:

(5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. - Psalms 23:5-6 ESV

There at the table was an overflowing cup with more blessings than she could ever imagine. Those invited to this supper are truly blessed:

(9) And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." - Revelation 19:9 ESV

There is a banquet table set out for God's children. It is a feast, the likes of which we have never seen. The fruit of God's Spirit is in abundant supply. As we sit to eat, we are clothed with beautiful garments of righteousness, forgiveness and praise. The Lord Jesus sits at that table with us:

(20) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. - Revelation 3:20 ESV

If you belong to the Lord today, rise from the dust and take your seat. The Father has a place for you at the table. You are invited to a feast of rich blessing and fellowship. At that table, you will find the strength to overcome. You will hear the truth of God's purpose for your life. You will rise from that table strengthened to fight the battle before you. There is no hope in the dust. Stop believing the lies of the enemy who tells you that you are destined for this. Rise up, put on your beautiful garment and clothe yourself with the strength of the Lord. Be seated at your place at the banquet set for you.

Isaiah's call echoes through the ages, and its tones ring in our ears today. Children of God, it is time to rise up. If there ever was a time when we needed to shake off the dust, it is now. The banquet is prepared, and your place has been set. Come and eat. Feast on the richness of His blessings and go in the strength and courage His provision and fellowship bring to break down the gates of hell and set the prisoner free. This is our calling and purpose. This is your privilege.

For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that You died to make it possible for me to be seated with you in heavenly places. I thank you that in You I can rise from the dust of sin and shame and take my place proudly at the banquet of your grace and blessing. Lord, I recognize that unless I feast richly at that table, I have nothing to offer this world. All the wisdom and strength to overcome is at

that table. Please help me to take my place. Teach me as I fellowship with You at that table. Strengthen me with the blessings from that table so I can take my authority as Your representative. May I be sustained by Your provision so that I can represent you as I ought.

Chapter 5 - Loose the Bonds from Your Neck

(2) loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. - Isaiah 52:2 ESV

As we began our reflections on Isaiah 52:1-2, we saw that God's people were caught in a deep sleep of death. God challenged them to awake, put on their strength and their beautiful garment. She was sitting in the dust, but God called her to take the seat He had prepared for her. Here in the final part of verse 2, God encourages her to loose the bonds from her neck.

Let's consider the picture these words paint for us. The children of God were in bonds. Those bonds were likely made of rope or chains wrapped around their necks, restraining them. The verse tells us that she was captive, being held against her will. The chain around her neck told everybody that she was not free but held by someone else and forced into slavery. It is a picture of helplessness and hopelessness.

The phrase, "O captive daughter of Zion," is striking. Zion, or Jerusalem, was the principal city of Israel and represented God's chosen people. Here we have the children of Israel held as captives and humiliated by her enemy. She is bound up with a chain around her neck. This is a shameful picture of God's chosen race. The daughter of the King of kings is being dragged into captivity by the chains of her enemy.

This condition is far from what God wanted for His people. He had called her to be a light to the world and a reflection of His glory and majesty to the nations. Instead, her enemy had conquered her. Her city had been overrun and defeated. Her temple was broken down, and the flame of her testimony was blown out.

What is most upsetting about this is that all this was of her own doing. Instead of standing strong in holiness, she had lusted after ungodly ways. She longed to be like the nations and turned her back on the God of Israel. She stuck out her neck for the enemy to enchain her, and that is exactly what he did.

She had been warned many times about this. God sent one prophet after another to speak to her, but she refused to listen. She wanted to do things her own way. She was not interested in being different from the nations. She ignored her calling to represent the Lord God. She chose rather to identify with the world around her, and now she was paying the price for her decisions.

The picture would be one of despair and hopelessness were it not for three words – “loose the bonds.” There is something very strange in these words. God tells those being led off into captivity to take off their chains. How was this possible? It was possible because their God was the Almighty God of Israel. He was the Creator of the universe.

You say, “But, God’s people turned their backs on Him and rebelled against Him.” That is true, but the God of Israel is faithful and forgiving. He does not cast off His people. Though they had disobeyed Him, they were still His people, and His love for them had never changed.

The words “loose the bonds” tell us that God was still giving His people a chance. They could once again be free. These chains did not have to remain. Just as they had invited the enemy to enchain them, they could also now set themselves free from his grip. The victory was theirs to take. Their enemy had no ultimate power over them. They could, in the strength God provided, strip those chains from their neck and walk away in total freedom.

What was true for Israel is also true for us. We have seen many who have professed salvation in Jesus Christ walk away and fell into the snare of the enemy. We have watched our youth wander down a path of rebellion and resistance. They, too, have invited the chains of the enemy.

We have witnessed churchgoers living in sin. We have ourselves lived with secret struggles and habits. Some have been entrapped by bitterness, anger and an unwillingness to forgive. Others have been ensnared by false teaching and traditions. We have sometimes lived a lie. There are so many chains that bind us. Many enemies hold us in captivity even as believers today. The words of Isaiah speak once again – “loose the chains from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

What hope these words give us today. We don't have to live defeated lives as believers. The enemy has been defeated at that cross. The power of the resurrection can restore life to our dying frame. We can rise up in the strength of the Lord. The enemy cannot hold us when the Lord stands with us.

The enemy would like to have you think that there is no victory. He would like you to believe that he now has full control, but in your heart, you know different. You are, in the Lord Jesus, an overcomer. It is not His purpose that you remain in sin. It is not His purpose that you live under the control of the enemy.

Enough is enough. The enemy has had too many victories in our world. Let us awake from our sleep. Let us put on the strength He provides. Let us clothe ourselves in the beautiful garments of forgiveness, praise and righteousness. It is time for us to rise up from the dust and take our seat of authority and dignity as children of the King of kings. Make it your commitment today to no longer allow the enemy to lead you by that chain around your neck. Today is the day to stop in your tracks and say: "I'm done with these chains. I will put up with them no more. This is the day I choose the Lord. This is the day I pull off those bonds and rise up to serve the Lord and experience the fullness of His life in me.

For Prayer:

Lord God, thank you that You sent Your Son to die to break the power of sin and pay its penalty. Thank you that because of His work, I can live in victory over the chains the enemy has placed around my neck. Thank you also that You have placed Your Holy Spirit in me to empower and lead me in Your purpose. I ask that You would help me to know Him more and walk in the power He provides. I confess that I have not always tapped into the source of my authority and power over sin. I recognize that there are sins over which I still need a victory in my life. I ask that You would show me how to loose those chains so that I can be free. May I never be content to live enchained by sin when You have provided all I need to be free from its power in my life.

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement.

F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into several languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry, and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books? For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at www.lighttomypath.ca