

Christmas Day

December 25, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, grant that the birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law. Alleluia!

Sermon Text: Isaiah 52:7-10

Do you know what Juneteenth Day is? Its first celebration fell right after the end of the Civil War. On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee arrived at Appomattox Court House to sign the Confederacy's formal surrender. Then on May 9, 1865, President Andrew Johnson reaffirmed that the North and South still remained one United States of America. So then, what is the importance of Juneteenth Day? Well, on June 19, 1865, those bound in slavery heard that they were finally set free.

Now, if you remember your American history, you realize that something about statement sounds odd. Yes, it is true that slave-labor continued an extra two months and two weeks after the war had officially ended. However, on January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln announced slavery's end with his Emancipation Proclamation. Even though the nation was divided, Lincoln's presidential words still applied to both the United States and the Confederacy. Yet, no one shared the joyful proclamation with the slaves. In fact, no one told them until June 19, 1865 (Juneteenth Day) that they were set free— and that in reality, they had already been free for 2 ½ years.

No one really knows why it took so long for the news to reach those in slavery. Some think the messenger might have been murdered. Others wonder if the slave-owners knowingly withheld the information in order to continue receiving free labor. Still others suggest that federal troops withheld the news just long enough for the plantation owners to finish harvesting (<http://www.juneteenth.com/history.htm>). Regardless of the reason for the delay, multitudes lived life in slavery even though in reality they were free.

Isaiah 52:7-10

- 7 How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good
news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”
- 8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their
voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the LORD returns to Zion,
they will see it with their own eyes.
- 9 Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
- 10 The LORD will lay bare his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth will see
the salvation of our God.

Can you imagine living life under a lie? To live and act one way when you could truly live and act another way? Perhaps you can. On the one hand you already hold the good, life-saving news that our God reigns; we live as people close to God. Yet, does it ever feel like God has really set you free from sin? Does it sometimes feel like life will forever be filled with guilt, disappointment, failure, and fear?

While we live in a world infected with sin and groaning under the effects of sin, Isaiah reminds you: **YOUR GOD REIGNS!** *See the good news. Stand wrapped in comfort.*

Is that not just music to your ears? Words like that promise a change in how life often appears. Believers throughout the ages rejoice at the evidence of God's power. You see it at the world's creation. God's mighty power brought a perfectly pain-free world into being. You rejoice at that; that is wonderful news! Yet, soon you mourn because you see the crafty devil lead perfection into such disarray.

In fact, the Old Testament is filled with rebellious sinners shaking a defiant fist at their Maker and seemingly getting away with it! It sounds horrible! You have Cain taking the life of his own brother ([Genesis 4:8-16](#)). You see men build a tower towards the heavens in order to challenge God's authority ([Genesis 11:1-4](#)). Or you see the surrounding circumstances of our reading.

God promised those living in the land of Judah that his Son would come through their bloodlines ([Genesis 49:10](#)). Instead of preparing their hearts and setting their minds on God's Word, they ignored it! They exchanged the living God for dead objects of gold. So many of them wanted nothing to do with his loving commands! God let them have what they wanted: life apart from his Word. He withdrew his protecting hand and allowed warring armies to invade their city without a struggle.

Be sure, there were remaining believers in Judah. Yet, when they looked around at everything that happened, it was difficult to see if **GOD STILL REIGNED**. Their city wall lies in rubble. Smoldering wreckage is piled high in the streets. Their king, councilmen, priests, and other influential leaders have been forcibly snatched to another country. Their splendid temple, their house of worship which their grandparents had built was destroyed by a godless nation. The temple gold, furnishings, and offerings had been ransacked and carried off. Most of all, this destruction came from hands that worshipped animals and stars.

Did the devil really win? Did he finally frustrate and irritate God so much that God gave up on the world? Does God really reign in the face of wickedness? Does he truly have control over the world or does the world dictate how he acts?

Sometimes you wonder, right? Have you ever felt that the devil is winning and that God is losing? Or that the devil can drive the world into deeper ungodliness and that God is completely powerless to help? You listen to the way people talk and it seem like more people prefer to live apart from God. You have seen a nation redefine marriage, intensely defend murdering the unborn, and limit free speech. You cringe as your own family drifts their upbringing—that they no longer want to sit in the house of worship in which they sat for so many years. You look around at life and it sometimes feels like God does not, cannot, and will never reign.

Is that really true? The devil loves to throw you into despair because it means that you stop trusting in your God's power. If you stop trusting in God's power, then you stop trusting in his Word. If you stop trusting in his Word, then you stop trusting in God altogether. Then if you stop trusting in God altogether, then you can deny the **REIGN OF YOUR GOD!**

What a desperate lie! The devil really stops at nothing to undermine what power God does have. You know, contrary to how you might feel or what the devil would have you believe, **Your God Reigns!** *See the good news.*

It plays out like something from an old western movie. Tall, reddish-brown craggy mountains surround you. You look up to see not outlaws, but something else, something completely unexpected. High up on the mountain a messenger comes, running, sprinting down to you. He does not threaten; he comes in peace; he comes with peace. **How beautiful those feet** for tired, weary hearts!

When he reaches you, he **proclaim[s] good news, peace, he bring[s] good tidings, he proclaim[s] salvation...** God has not forgotten about his people; he has not forgotten about you!

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. In a world where it seems that evil runs rampant, *see the good news.* God has sent his Son at his right time—and he did for all the world to see. This child will grow up and grow in the knowledge of God's Word. He will love that Word with all his heart. Even though he lives in a world where people lie and cheat and still self-righteously thump their chest, Jesus knows God still reigns!

Even though he goes to the cross, even though he dies, even though he has every reason to doubt that his Father truly has power over this world, he still trusts his God. There on the cross the devil is crushed, destroyed, struck down. His lies have come to an end. Jesus has a perfect trust for God. He takes his perfect trust and covers your life with that same trust.

Now God sees you as someone who trusts him with all their heart. It means that you are set free from hell's captivity; you are set free for eternal life! **YOUR GOD REIGNS!** *See the good news!*

The devil would love for you to doubt that Jesus really removed your sins. He would love for you to challenge God's control. He would love for you to fear living in this world. Yet, remember, **Your God Reigns!** *Stand wrapped in comfort.*

Just imagine, for years people looked forward to this unseen promise that Jesus is coming. Now on Christmas Day, no more imagining what he looks like; they can see him. No more anxious wondering if God would send a Son. No more nerve-wracking wondering when God would send his Son. This Child is here; all hopeful worrying is over; God has fulfilled his promise. **Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.**

The Lord has brought you comfort—just as he promised. He speaks to you through his Word. In such clear language he reveals the great lengths he takes in order to pay the

price for your sins. In such clear language he promises that he is with you always, even to the very end of the age. *Stand wrapped in comfort.*

You see this conquering love repeated at the baptismal font. The water and the powerful Word has freed you from hell's bondage. It has washed, cleansed, made you a citizen of a heavenly kingdom. Each time you walk past that font, you remember that your God has drawn you to himself. *Stand wrapped in comfort.*

Your Savior draws you to his Holy Supper, where he gives you a taste of his triumphant victory. The devil has lost. You receive strength to willingly live for God. You hear his gentle assurance: "Your sins are forgiven. You are at peace with me!" *Stand wrapped in comfort.*

Your Savior remains with you even after Christmas ends. The comfort of God stands next to you at the gravesite. There he reminds you that because he lives, your loved one will live. The comfort of God sits in the chair next to you when we see violence break out again. He tells you: "I reign. Even tragedy does not pluck you from me." The comfort of God hugs you when you are fearful about the health of your family, when you grow anxious about the future, when you wonder how long life as you know it will remain intact. He has redeemed you (that is, bought you out of hell); he has promised you an even greater life to come.

Because **The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.** At just the right time, God rolled up his sleeves and moved Judah out of captivity and back into their old homeland. In fact, God bared his mighty arm many times before. He rolled up his sleeves to bring Israel out of Egypt. He rolled up his sleeves when he sent Jesus down from heaven and into your world. He bared his arm again when the devil was helplessly crushed by the cross. When his time is right, he will bare his arm again— not to punish, but to powerfully take you home to himself.

Slavery lasted 2 ½ years longer than it should have. No one really knows why it took so long for the news to reach those in captivity. Some think the messenger might have been murdered. Others wonder if the slave-owners knowingly withheld the information in order to continue receiving free labor. Still others suggest that federal troops withheld the news just long enough for the plantation owner to finish harvesting (<http://www.juneteenth.com/history.htm>). Regardless of the reason for the delay, multitudes lived life under slavery even though they were truly free. Yet, when Juneteenth Day first arrived, maybe rejoiced and danced in jubilation.

Christmas Day brings us an even greater joy. You look around at our present-day world and it might feel like God has really set you free from sin. It sometimes feels like life will forever be filled with guilt, disappointment, failure, and fear. Yet, those are lies. You know the truth; you have seen it.

God has come—just as he promised! He wrapped himself in flesh for you. He destroys the devil's power for you. He comforts you through life's journey. While you live in a world infected with sin and groaning under the effects of sin Isaiah reminds you: **YOUR GOD REIGNS!** *See the good news. Stand wrapped in comfort.*