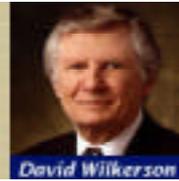




TIMES SQUARE CHURCH PULPIT SERIES

SERMONS BY DAVID WILKERSON



The Healing Power of Gladness

by David Wilkerson
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Isaiah 16 vividly describes what happens to a proud nation that falls under God's judgment. Isaiah is prophesying here about Moab, an enemy to Israel: "We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so" (Isaiah 16:6).

Throughout Scripture, the nation of Moab serves as a symbol. It represents all self-reliant people who have turned their backs on God and fallen under his judgment. In every case, the Lord sent his wrath on such nations. Yet Isaiah was prophesying here not just about biblical nations, but about societies down through history to our day. The prophet was warning, in essence, "Every proud nation will face God's wrath."

Moab had been warned repeatedly about their sin. But they refused all of God's merciful pleadings. These people wanted nothing to do with Jehovah God. Instead, they began to persecute his people. As a result, God's judgments on Moab were severe. Awful droughts dried up their fields and destroyed their vineyards. The devastation was so terrible, the prophet's tears were said to be the only water in the land (see 16:9).

Many similar judgments are mentioned throughout the book of Isaiah. Yet one particular phrase comes up time after time to describe them: "Gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field" (16:10). Simply put: at one time there was prosperity, fullness and plenty. But suddenly, in an instant, those blessings vanished.

In biblical times, harvest was always a time of great celebration. Yet after judgment fell on Moab, there were no shouts of "Harvest!" ringing through the streets. God declared, "In the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease" (16:10).

Any trace of joy in Moab became a thing of the past. Now instead, a cloud of sadness and grief hung over the society. We find a similar description of Moab in Jeremiah 48. According to Jeremiah, all gladness and joy were removed because Moab was under divine judgment. And in their place was an awful, solemn silence.

I want you to consider the landscape in America today. What do you see and hear? Personally, I've never witnessed such fear in our land. This isn't just because I live in New York City and have seen the effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. No, my prophetic sense tells me there's fear in the air because we're being judged. Our proud, haughty nation has fallen under God's divine wrath. And joy and gladness are being removed.

Yet this fear isn't only taking place in America. It has spread worldwide. After the terrorist bombings in Israel, for example, people

are no longer leaving their homes. They're afraid to drive their cars, go to restaurants, be caught in a crowd. Children don't play outside anymore. And adults find it impossible to sleep. Literally, joy and gladness have disappeared from Israel's streets.

In India and Pakistan, multitudes live in fear of nuclear destruction. Both of these opposing nations now have nuclear weapons and fear the other's hostility. Yet even within their own borders, people are suspicious of each other. They walk around fearful, without any joy.

In Argentina, the national currency is collapsing. Banks are closing, and people are lining up for blocks, hoping to get their money out. News photos have shown people walking through the streets in a daze. Women who once danced and sang in public are now silent. Instead, they gather by the thousands, marching and banging on pots and pans with spoons, trying to register their despair. Gladness in that nation is gone.

Japan is hovering on the brink of utter chaos. Its once-proud people are now turning to unbridled sin to quell their anxiety. Pornography flourishes. Alcohol and drug abuse are rampant. The people are trying to numb themselves, but when the party's over they're still filled with fear. Meanwhile, their joy has dissipated.

Russia is a wounded bear, licking its open sores. Alcoholism has made slaves of multitudes of unemployed men in that crippled nation. You see them sitting forlornly in city parks, a hollow look of despair in their eyes, their lives lost to vodka. In just ten years, the average life span of the Russian male has dropped from sixty-something to fifty-four years of age. Gladness has vanished from their lives.

In China, the world's most populous nation, men now outnumber women six to one. This is the outcome of the government's decision to stop population growth by forcing abortions of female babies. Now millions of adult Chinese men are in despair, because they know they'll never marry. They'll never get to experience the joy of having a family. And their despair has slowly turned to seething. Millions of these men have flocked to cities but can't find jobs. The mood throughout the nation is one of morbidity, full of hopelessness. The people's joy has been lost.

When destruction hit the Twin Towers in New York City, the cry was, "This is going to change our nation forever. We'll never be the same. Nothing will ever be normal again." How true. The innocence, joy and gladness that many Americans once knew is gone forever. And it will never be recaptured.

Yet this mood isn't just the result of 9/11. Forest fires have raged out of control nationwide, consuming millions of trees. Some of the worst droughts in history have swept one-third of America, decimating vast acres of farmland. Devouring locusts have swarmed through several states, bringing a plague worse than any in our history. Floods overwhelmed Texas, paralyzing Houston and San Antonio, and causing millions of dollars' worth of damage.

Then came the shaking on Wall Street. In the past two years, 1,000 businesses have gone bankrupt, the most in our history. Even mighty America Online is staggering. And now we hear shocking revelations of rampant greed among CEOs. The heads of some of America's most respected institutions pilfered billions of dollars as their companies were breaking up.

Here is what I see on the American landscape right now: desolation and sadness. Just as Isaiah prophesied about Moab, our nation's joy and gladness are being taken away. Why? America is under judgment for her sinful pride. And, like Moab, we're seeing God's wrath everywhere we turn.

The Bible says that in the
last days, men's hearts
will fail them for fear.

According to Jesus, people will suffer heart attacks over the frightful things to come upon the earth. During this time of judgment, all joy and gladness will be removed from the ungodly. Yet at the same time, God's people will be given a spirit of joy and gladness: "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

Jesus Christ alone is the source of all joy and gladness. The Psalmist says of him, "God...hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Psalm 45:7). The oil mentioned in this Psalm represents the Holy Spirit. The writer is saying, "Only those who press in to a closer walk with Jesus will obtain the joy of his Spirit."

In the passage above, Isaiah is telling us that in the midst of the dark times to come, a remnant of God is going to awaken. And they're going to lay hold of the Spirit of Christ, possessing him, obtaining him, taking hold of him. In those hard days of judgment, the Spirit of joy and gladness that resides in Christ will be theirs. And no condition, circumstance or person will be able to touch their joy or steal it.

It will be a different story for the backslidden church, however. The prophet Joel tells us that a church "laid waste with sin" will have all its joy and gladness cut off: "Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God?" (Joel 1:16). Simply put, dead religion has no joy in it.

Please don't take what I'm about to say as a criticism of the Catholic Church. But after the recent child-sex scandals involving priests, many Catholic churches have become like morgues. Thousands have left the church, either in sadness and grief, or in fear for their children. It's almost impossible to find any "oil of gladness" in Catholic churches now.

The same dead spirit also fills many Protestant churches. Young men and women are entering mainline seminaries only to have their faith robbed. They're taught to no longer believe in heaven or hell, the Resurrection, the Virgin Birth. It's no wonder the churches they're pastoring are dead. When Christ isn't present, there can be no joy or gladness. Jesus is the sole source of it all.

There may be no joy or gladness in wicked society, or among the ungodly, or in dead, formal churches. But Isaiah speaks a word of hope to the righteous:

"Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law" (Isaiah 51:7). God is speaking here to all those

who know and obey him. And he gives them a loving rebuke:

"I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy?" (51:12-13). The Lord is saying, "Why have you forgotten who I am? Am I not the same Almighty one who cut down your enemy Egypt? I wounded that mighty nation with great judgments. And I delivered you by powerful miracles. I opened the Red Sea, and you walked to safety. I kept you and preserved you through it all.

"I know you're facing a new day of hard, frightful times. But I'm still your mighty deliverer. I created you, and I can keep you. I stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. You know that. Yet, in spite of this, you quickly forget about my power on your behalf. Where is the enemy who can hurt you? Nobody can bring harm to you, because I hold you in the palm of my hand."

We who know Christ's
righteousness aren't to live as
those who are without hope.

We have been blessed with both the love and the fear of God. And his will for us in the darkest, most terrible times is to obtain his joy and gladness. Even as we see judgment falling around us, we're to sing, shout and rejoice - not because judgment has come, but in spite of it.

Isaiah 51:11 begins with the word "Therefore," meaning, "In light of what I've just said." What had God just said here? He had reminded his people, "(I) made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over" (Isaiah 51:10). He was saying, "I'm still the Lord, the Ancient of Days, the worker of miracles. And my arm is still strong to deliver you."

So, what is it God wants his people to know in light of this truth? He says it all in one verse, Isaiah 51:11:

* "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion." In other words: "I'm going to have a people who return to me with trust, faith and confidence. They'll take their eyes off their conditions and the calamities surrounding them. And they'll get back their song of joy."

* "Everlasting joy shall be upon their head." The joy that God's people experience won't be just for a Sunday morning, or a week or a month. It will last all through the year, through hard times, even to the very end.

* "Sorrow and mourning shall flee away." This doesn't mean all our suffering will end. It means our trust in the Lord will put us above every pain and trial. Such things won't be able to rob us of our joy and gladness in Christ.

* "They shall obtain gladness and joy." God looked down through the ages and said, "I'm going to have a people who will obtain joy, take it, possess it. They'll lay hold of it, and it will be theirs."

Those who obtain his joy will become some of the greatest testimonies of God's power on earth. Think of what this will mean when the worst of times hit. While men's hearts are failing them, and society is numbing itself, a humble people will be standing confi-

dently in the midst of it all. And they will exude a supernatural joy and gladness.

Make no mistake: Christians will suffer the same things as everyone else during times of judgment. They'll lose jobs, feel the pain of physical suffering, endure family problems. But through it all, they'll have a spirit of peace. And the world will know it. People will look at them and say, "He must truly know God after all. Otherwise, how could he be so calm?"

I know two such vibrant witnesses, a couple who attends Times Square Church. Seven years ago they came to me asking for prayer, when they were expecting a child. Their doctor had told them their baby would be abnormal. But thanks to the Lord, little Brian was born perfectly healthy.

Now, seven years later, Brian has developed a tumor in his spine. Recently, it caused him to collapse and has rendered him a quadriplegic. When his parents told me the news, I was brokenhearted. But despite their pain, Brian's father and mother were full of peace. They didn't question God. Instead, they found joy in the Lord. All they asked that day was, "Please pray for Brian."

This beautiful couple offers a stark contrast to a society filled with fear. They're able to testify as David did to the healing power of gladness: "O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me...thou hast brought up my soul from the grave...Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever" (Psalm 30:2-3, 11-12).

Yet what poor testimonies some believers are today. All they can talk about are their fears: fear of losing a job, fear of the stock market collapsing, fear of a terrorist attack. I'm not saying we shouldn't have fears. That wouldn't be normal, especially in these times. But Jesus commands us to cast all our cares on him, because he cares for us. Most fearful Christians today aren't doing that at all. They're as downcast and despairing as the rest of society.

Likewise, many Christian marriages don't have any joy or gladness. Children come home to find their parents fighting and bickering. And when the house isn't filled with chaos, it's a silent mortuary. There's no love, only resentment, deadness and isolation. I tell you, these parents have allowed Satan to rob them of what makes a home strong. Scripture says the joy of the Lord is our strength. And right now, their home needs a baptism of joy and gladness.

Other Christians are bound by chains of fear and worry. They worry about the future, their health, their children, the growing panic in the world. If this applies to you, remember the Lord's words: "Who are you to fear and fret? Am I no longer Almighty God to you? Haven't I been faithful in your life? You're still a sheep in my flock. And I have promised to make a way for you. So, why have you forgotten about me?"

**It's going to become more
and more important for
God's people to obtain the
oil of joy and gladness.**

The evil I foresee coming upon the world is unbelievable. It will be so vile and wicked, even the hardest, most atheistic people are go-

ing to reel with shock and panic. Yet God's Word predicts it all. Jesus himself said evil men would wax worse and worse, and a terrible shaking would come upon the whole earth.

I ask you, what kind of demonic madness has fallen over America, that innocent little girls are being kidnapped, raped and killed? Even hardened prisoners weep over these tragedies. What kind of hell has descended on our nation that hundreds of inner-city children are disappearing, being sold as slaves into prostitution rings? Soon we're going to hear awful revelations of child-slavery camps, where child pornography is filmed.

Now a panic has begun on Wall Street. I believe we'll eventually see the Dow drop below 5,000 points. Real estate will go bust. The stock exchange may rebound, but it will be a fool's market. Here in New York City, we're seeing the effects of the economic chaos. Already we see those who have suddenly become homeless.

How are God's people to respond in such times? Should we simply say, "I refuse to hear any more bad news," stick our heads in the sand, and ignore all the revelations of evil? We couldn't do that even if we wanted to. We're bombarded by the awful news reports every day.

So, how can we obtain joy and gladness in a panic-stricken world gone mad? Isaiah gives us the answer. First, he describes the conditions of the times he was seeing: "Treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously. Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee. O inhabitant of the earth...The earth is utterly broken down...the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard...and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it" (Isaiah 24:16-17, 19-20).

This sounds exactly like the current condition in the world. Business leaders have dealt treacherously and are being led to jail. Our land is enduring natural disaster after disaster. And people are reeling in absolute fear. Indeed, I believe Isaiah was seeing our day.

Yet even as Isaiah witnessed the earth reeling under God's judgments, he saw something wonderful that surpassed it all. This vision filled him with rejoicing. He declared, "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (25:1).

The prophet was saying, in essence, "Lord, your wonderful guidance is coming to your people. Your new mercies and great faithfulness are on the way. No human being has ever seen what you're about to bring."

What is God going to do? First, he's going to bring down every violent enemy of his church: "Thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee" (25:2-3).

Yet here is what caused Isaiah to rejoice. In the midst of all the violence, the raging storms, the disasters of the nations, the increase in wickedness, Isaiah saw God's hand revealing his power: "For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall" (25:4).

What does Isaiah mean here when he speaks of "a storm against the wall"? The wall is Jesus Christ, our protector and defense. Isaiah saw the coming storm hit this wall but not move it. In fact, no storm can ever shake it. Jesus reigns as King over every storm.

And his people are safe inside his wall.

Isaiah also saw a people who were "poor and needy," in utter distress. He was speaking of people without jobs, with no finances, the homeless, the hungry. Isaiah says that in that day, Christ himself will be a strength and refuge to these people. He'll personally take care of all their needs.

**Isaiah also saw a mountain,
with a feast taking place that
was open to all.**

"In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isaiah 25:6).

The mountain Isaiah refers to here is a mountain of prayer. In the darkest of times, the prophet saw a people of God ascending to the Lord's table through intercession. And they feasted with him through intimate communion. They were partaking of "fat things," or "that which makes the face to shine." This fat represents the oil of the Holy Spirit. In short, these people were being filled to shining with the Holy Ghost.

Here is the image that caused Isaiah to rejoice: in a time of violence and utter chaos, God's people were going to their knees. And they were feasting at his table, obtaining mighty resources to face the storm.

"He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations" (25:7). These praying people were being set free from every veil that blinded them to a greater vision of Christ. God was opening their eyes supernaturally. And they couldn't be deceived by any false doctrine or teaching.

I praise God for Isaiah's incredible vision. Through this passage, the prophet has given us the secret to obtaining the spirit of joy and gladness. It's all about going to prayer and waiting on the Lord. He's going to save us in that day, because we'll be found within his walls.

This assurance makes us bold witnesses of God's goodness in any storm. When that day comes, the whole world will look at us and know, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness" (Proverbs 10:28).

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Dearly Beloved:

GOD BLESS AND KEEP YOU IN HIS LOVE.

In the most trying of times, the Lord instructs us to rejoice and be glad in him. In Psalm 9, David says, "I will be glad in thee" (verse 2). Why? Because "the Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed in times of trouble" (verse 9).

I believe that one of the greatest testimonies to a fearful and bewildered society will be the peace, joy and serenity of God's people in times of distress and terror. Those who trust the Lord completely will be given supernatural rest and peace. No evil report will rob them of their gift of confidence in God's faithfulness to them.

Here in New York City we see signs of a great financial storm brewing. Next year this city faces a six-billion-dollar black hole, with the possibility of 25,000 layoffs of city workers. New York City employs over 250,000 municipal workers. Wall Street is laying off many thousands more, in addition to the 20,000 who have already been laid off.

We see more and more homeless people sleeping on the streets in cardboard boxes. City shelters are now overcrowded, and the problem grows worse by the week. Vacant office space is mounting. Rents are falling. A number of fire stations will be closed. Not a single government official, state or city, has a solution. The city cannot borrow any more money. The state cannot bail out the city, because it faces a budget shortfall exceeding \$10 billion. The mayor is warning the city that very hard times are coming. Even now, signs of civil unrest are evident.

I HAVE BEEN WARNING FOR A LONG TIME THAT AMERICA'S LARGEST, MOST PROSPEROUS CITY WILL GO BANKRUPT. I HAVE ALSO PREDICTED THAT NEW YORK CITY IS GOING TO EXPLODE WITH OVER 1,000 FIRES RAGING THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE METROPLEX.

I tell you, we are nearing the fulfillment of this awful prophetic vision I've seen coming. A season of total anarchy is racing down upon us. Young people will be breaking into clothing stores, stealing everything in sight. Unemployed workers will also take to the streets, looting and burning. In the not-too-distant future, the National Guard will not be able to handle all the street warfare.

I am so sure of this that I am making contingency plans to be in a position to shelter and feed as many people as possible during this period of chaos. We will not run. We will be here in the middle of it all, to minister in what I truly believe will be a war zone.

The explosion of violence will spread to other cities. I dread the thought. But I must prophesy what I see. And, in and through it all, God's people who trust him will maintain an inner calm and gladness, resting in the Lord's promises. Your support this week will be greatly appreciated. In a miraculous way, God is meeting our needs through caring, praying supporters.

Thank you. His bondservant,
DAVID WILKERSON

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