

Full Price for the Prince of Peace

☆ **Building a highway (v.10)**

☆ **Paying the bills (v.11)**

☆ **Filling His house (v.112)**

In the name of Jesus-Immanuel, our newborn Brother and God-with us, dear family of God:

What's the problem with Christmas? It depresses more people than you can imagine. Sometimes it's loss of health for folks like many of our members who wish they could be in church. Sometimes it's family conflict or loss of job. But the real problem beneath all these problems is what Isaiah describes in vivid detail leading into this part about The Spiritual, Eternal Deliverance. I'll share select verses, but entire chapter is well worth reading. Listen to God's powerful word through Isaiah in chapter 59: *"Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear...."¹² For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us....¹⁵ ...The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak....²⁰ The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD...."* (Isaiah 59 *passim* NIV84)

And then Isaiah breaks out like a brilliant sunrise in Chapter 60: *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."* (Isaiah 60:1-3 NIV84) And that, dear friends, takes a very expensive highway to fill God's house with light and life in joyful worshipers. This great highway to heaven did not come cheap. It was **Full Price for the Prince of Peace**.

☆ **Building a highway (v.10)**

Most of us only know about **Building a highway** from what we see driving by in the summertime. Our hopes for highways usually mean, "Go ahead and build as long as you're done before I get there! And make them last forever." We're so impatient with heavy equipment unknown to much of the world. I've seen highways built by hand in China, three shifts running round the clock, I'm told, with pick axes and shovels. And they're modern freeways like ours until you exit onto dirt roads into old China.

That's the picture here of hand building a highway God's way. The people encourage each other to *pass through the gates* and get to work on the highway. It takes lots of preparation to raise up the road bed and remove the big stones and boulders for travelers to ride along smoothly. And there's signage too, not like our metal signs, but like a *banner* waiving in the wind *for the nations* to see and come. That *banner* is still waving on God's highway today.

The Holy Spirit uses the same Hebrew word for *banner* in Numbers 21. We heard in last night's sermon how the Israelites complained about God and Moses in the desert. The LORD sent fiery serpents that killed many people. When Moses prayed for them, the LORD had him raise a bronze serpent like a *banner* on a pole. Jesus told Nicodemus this foreshadowed Him: *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Jesus is still waving as the *banner for the nations*: *"I am the way and*

the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 3:14–16; 14:6 NIV84)
Christmas is a special time to hear and heed God’s loving call in the Person of His only begotten Son.

☆ **Paying the bills (v.11)**

The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’ ”

Does that word “*reward*” trouble you? Doesn’t the LORD clearly tell us that we only deserve His wrath and punishment because of our sins? Yes, but God’s Word also shows again here how God’s mercy triumphs over His judgment. Through Isaiah the LORD predicted the fall of the ten northern tribes of Israel under the Assyrians. He also showed Isaiah what would happen a century later when the Babylonians carried Judah into Exile and burned God’s temple in the destruction of Jerusalem. God even gave Isaiah (44:28; 45:1) the name of *Cyrus*, the Persian king who would free God’s people from their Captivity and set up the rebuilding of God’s temple in Jerusalem. God would “*reward*” His people not because of their personal righteousness, but because of His righteousness that He would give them.

Parents and grandparents know how this works. Let’s say one of my grandsons draws me a picture. He is not aware that his parents feed and cloth him, give him the paper, crayons or markers and maybe even suggested a picture for Grandpa. Grandpa knows by now not to ask, “What is it?” A better question would be, “Tell me about your picture.” There may be a whole story behind those stick figures. And when I point to something sticky on the paper and ask, “What’s this?” “Oh, Grandpa! That’s my cereal from breakfast!” It’s not part of the picture. But the child’s love certainly is.

Our heavenly Father loves to reward His children for Jesus’ sake. He put His Name on us in our Baptism. Living in us by His Word and sacraments, His dear Holy Spirit brings us into God’s kingdom of grace. All God has He gives to us, blessings streaming from the manger. In fact, when God looks at us by faith, He sees only His eternally begotten Son Jesus. He sees us as good as Jesus. And God the Father graciously rewards us for all the good things Jesus did when He lived and died in our place.

☆ **Filling His house (v.112)**

That’s why, “*all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.*” (Colossians 1:6 NIV84) Like the shepherds and Jesus’ apostles, “*We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*” (Acts 4:20 NIV84) One of the most awesome things about God’s love is that the more you share it, the more you enjoy it. It keeps on growing the farther it shines into earth’s dark night.

Isaiah could see clearly this was for Jews and all of us Gentiles too. “*They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.*”

How grateful I am to remember the faithful pastors from the Wisconsin Synod driving over the Cascade Mountains in Oregon to preach God’s Word to us in my uncle’s living room. Some of those sermons still speak sweetly to my heart. Lutheran Bible Camp devotions were warm and cozy with evening hymns of praise and a message of God’s love in Christ to send our young hearts to peaceful slumber. These memories grow more precious as the years unfold. And now I get to see how faithful God has been with His Word in my family and the next generation growing up on God’s love.

That was the answer for a woman who kept asking about my daughters, “What did you feed them to make them such hard workers, industrious, fun to have around?” I finally told her, “It was God’s Word. We taught the sweet parts.” And you know how sweet it is when you’ve knelt beside the manger to look into the face of God. “The Word did not become a philosophy, a theory, or a concept to be discussed. But the Word became a person to be followed, enjoyed and loved!”¹ May every Christmas find your heart in the manger nestling by your Savior. **The Prince of Peace paid Full Price for you! Amen.**

¹ From a favorite card by DaySpring Christmas Expressions for Christmas 2012.
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