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Good News for the Late Night Blues

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TEXT: Isaiah 12 (ESV)

You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day:

"Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.

"Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

Sometimes worry and fear have a way of creeping into our lives and taking over. They may come in and keep you awake at night after you've watched the late-night news with the talk of nuclear attacks and violence and division and climate change issues. And it caused you to wonder, "God, do you see what's going on down here? Where are you?" I find that the words of Isaiah 12 are quite helpful for those kinds of moments. This psalm-like passage, written by Isaiah the Prophet, is a real treasure that's meant to give God's people hope, and it can give us reassurance. It describes a new day ahead that God will bring about.

And so, in Isaiah 12:1, the psalm begins, "You will say in that day." So what day is being talked about? We need to ask. And what's the story behind this promise from God? Isaiah 12 comes from a very dark time in the history of God's chosen people. The

Promised Land had been divided into two nations, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, and there was great animosity between them. Of course, this was not what God had in mind for them when he settled his people into this land. And we learn in Isaiah 1-8 that both nations had come under God's judgment because of their unfaithfulness to God. Both nations were worshipping pagan idols and not trusting in God alone by making alliances with pagan nations in the name of national security. Great injustices were also happening in their society, Isaiah tells us; there was greed and power mongering and wickedness, and they had become the norm. And the commandments to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself were broken. Their hearts were far from God, and now they were under God's judgment and facing serious future consequences.

It was in the midst of this disobedience and unfaithfulness that God commissioned Isaiah to be his spokesman to Judah. Isaiah was to announce God's judgment against his people and the consequences to come. God was going to first use Assyria, Isaiah said, the world power of the day, as his disciplining tool against his people. The Assyrians were going to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel and take those people to Assyria in exile and Israel would lose their land. And God told Judah through Isaiah that Judah would be spared from destruction at that moment, but it too would come to regret its unfaithfulness to God by first having to live under Assyrian oppression. And then later on, Judah would suffer a great defeat and lose their land to a new world power designated by God to carry out his judgment against Judah. That was Babylon. And like Israel, the people of Judah would lose their land and be taken away to Babylon to live as exiles.

Not a bright future. But along with this word of judgment, there's a surprising thing that happens. God's prophet also brought a word of grace and hope. It's interesting in scripture, there's that pattern happening all the time. There's sin and then judgment and then God's grace. He tells them a promise about their future that they could hang on to as they went through hard times. Isaiah announced to them a new day would be coming – a day of salvation, courtesy of God's grace. God assured them this is not the end of you or of our relationship. "I'm not writing you off. A day is coming when I will rescue you and get you back home again to serve me." And God also promised them a king, a new king from David's lineage who would one day arrive on the scene. And he will rule in righteousness. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father and Prince of Peace and the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon this

king, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. So, yes, judgment lay ahead for Judah, but then God would exercise his grace towards them, and a new, glorious day of salvation would arrive for God's faithful remnant – those who trusted and served God.

And so that's where today's reading comes in, in Isaiah 12. It is describing the people's joyful experience and response to that great day God was going to bring about. He says, "You will say these things in that day. Number one, you'll say, 'Thank you, Lord, for forgiving me.'" Isaiah says it this way. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you are angry with me, your anger turned away that you might comfort me. It said second, in that day, you will also say, I am not afraid because I'm saved by God. I'm his. He is my strength and song. And in him I trust. Isaiah puts it this way. Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and will not be afraid for the Lord God is my strength and my song. And He has become my salvation. Third, in that day, you will no longer thirst. Isaiah says, because God will quench your thirst at the wells of salvation. He puts it this way: with joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah said next in that day, you will say to one another, God's done a great thing for us, so let's go tell his story to everyone around us and invite them to join us in worshipping our exalted God who is above all things. Verses 3-5 states at like this. And you will say on that day, Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known as deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted, sing praises to the Lord, for He has done gloriously Let this be known in all the earth. And finally, Isaiah says, In that day you will shout and sing for joy because the Lord has come to dwell with you. He puts it this way Shout and sing for joy, oh inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy one of God.

That's quite a vision for those people to hang on to a day full of grace when there will be forgiveness, salvation, witnessing, worshipping God who will come and be with us. That's the promise. So, we need to ask, did that day ever happen? And the answer to that is yes, it did eventually. God kept his word and Assyria didn't destroy Judah or capture Jerusalem, though they tried. God protected them. Assyria was brought down eventually, as God said he would bring them down, but not until they had destroyed the whole northern kingdom of Israel and dragged the people out of the promised land into exile, just as God had said would happen. Judah went on living as a vassal state under the oppression of the Assyrians, who drained their treasury and put idols in their temple. And they had king after king, who fell far short of filling that promise of the great king God had promised in Isaiah 9, the wonderful counselor, the Prince of Peace,

who would trust in God alone and lead God's people down paths of righteousness. And therefore, God's people continued living disobedient lives, falling further and further away from God under the leadership of these kings.

A few years later, then, God did use another world power, as he said, named Babylon, to exercise His judgment upon his people. Judah and Jerusalem were left in ruins. The king was dethroned, and most of the people were dragged off to Babylon, all like God said he would make happen. And after exile, God brought them back to the Promised Land, re-established them once again as his light to the nations. But things were far from perfect when they got home. There was no king any longer. They lived under the control of the Persians and then the Greeks and then the Roman empires. They rebuilt their temple, the house of God. But there is no mention of the presence and glory of God in the new temple or in the midst of His people, as God promised in Isaiah 12.

So, what about Isaiah 12? Why didn't it happen? Ah, but you see. That's not the end of the story. Next, we get to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And we learned that many, many years later, a virgin gave birth to a child. His father was from the lineage of King David. His name means "God Saves." The child eventually became an adult, and began a ministry in God's name. His main message to God's people was the promised new day had arrived. He talked of God's new kingdom and of how they could enter into that kingdom through repentance and faith in him. It was different, though, as was he, from what God's people had expected. So, they didn't know what to make of Jesus or His kingdom that he was talking about. And they expected a king who would conquer their enemies. But he wasn't anything like that at all. He said that he had come to serve and to give his life up as a ransom for many to set them free.

After his baptism in the Jordan River, when he was affirmed by the voice of God calling him "son," and the Spirit hovered over him, he announced next in his hometown synagogue, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me." Sound familiar? And He displayed the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might knowledge in the fear of the Lord that God promised of the Messianic King in Isaiah. His delight was in the fear of the Lord, and he exercised perfect righteousness before God, the Father. In fact, so perfect was that righteousness in perfect obedience to God, he allowed himself to be nailed to a cross by those who opposed him. As God's perfect, unblemished sacrifice that would save sinners like you and me from God's judgment upon sin and give us His forgiveness. Through Him, God was accomplishing His salvation plan. And then God

raised him from the dead, vindicated, and endorsing Jesus and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. Through the cross and the resurrection, then, God in Christ has defeated the powers of sin and death and the devil that held humanity captive. And he opened the door to eternal life with God for all who placed their trust in Him. And after his resurrection, the Lord Jesus would stand in the midst of his disciples and explain to them that that all that they had witnessed was the fulfillment of God's promises in the law and prophets like Isaiah to save his people. And now that they knew this, they were to go and announce this great thing God had done to all the world so that all people might believe and join them in worshipping and enjoying a new life with God. And Jesus promised to His disciples, "And as you do this low, I am with you always to the end of the age." And he has promised that everyone who comes and drinks from his well will never thirst again. Remember, John 4, the woman at the well? "In fact, out of your heart, he says shall flow rivers of living water." He was talking about his Holy Spirit, who comes and dwells in the believer, so that you need never be alone. God will be with you through His Holy Spirit.

In other words, what I'm saying to your friends is Isaiah 12 has happened. Salvation has come through Jesus Christ. And if you are a follower of his, Isaiah 12 is about you; what happens in your life. You've been forgiven. You've been saved, called to declare God saving actions through Jesus. And you are not alone in this scary world ever again. And furthermore, even that's not the end of the story behind Isaiah 12, because we know that one day there will be a great consummation, the end of history as we know it, and Jesus will return in power and authority to judge the living and the dead. And there will be a new heaven and a new earth and evil and death will be totally destroyed. And we will hear a loud voice from the throne of God declaring, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God himself will be with them as their God." He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. It's a new day worshipping in his presence.

So, by now you might be thinking, "Well, that's a nice Bible history lesson, Steve, but what in the world does that have to do with my worries and fears in the here and now?" Let me explain. You see, Isaiah 12 reminds us that even in the midst of the darkest times when evil seemed to be prevailing and things seem totally out of control, God was still at work in his world. He was still in charge of the world. History is his story, and this world is his world. That's what Isaiah 12 reminds us of. He has not

changed, this God that we worship in faith. We as his people can confidently say, "This is my father's world. O Let me never forget that though the wrong seems off so strong. God is the ruler yet." So, we can relax and take a deep breath every day and say to ourselves and to one another, "Relax. We're in good, strong hands."

Isaiah 12 also serves to remind us that our unchanging God kept his promises, and he always will. He has proven his faithfulness to us. He is always true to his word. We can confidently count on everything He promises us in that word: eternal life, that he answers our prayers, that he'll give us strength and help as we turn to him to face each day. And finally, we can rest assured that God is with us. He does not abandon his own. We can confidently say, along with the Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me, Lord, your rod and your staff, they comfort me." So, God's gracious fulfillment of Isaiah 12 allows me to cast all my worries and fears on him and find peaceful rest in him both day and night in his loving presence and his promises. So, when we don't like the outlook, we can always try the up-look and keep our focus on God.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for faithfully fulfilling the vision in Isaiah 12. Thank you for the day that Jesus stepped into our world to save us from sin, to bring us back to you. Thank you for the promise to always be with us in all circumstances. Thank you for the working of your Holy Spirit. We ask that by his power, you would help us to always remember your power and love and to always trust in you. Amen.