

Isaiah's prophecy, Ch 60
 a chapter about Zion's glory restored.
 Remember - Isaiah 1 - 39

is about the fall of Jerusalem.

All of Judah were defeated by the Babylonians
 and most of the survivors were taken captive
 to be slaves in exile in a foreign land.

Isaiah 40 - 66 is about restoration
 Judah's punishment is over
 God is building a highway
 and his people will return from exile in triumph.

Chapter 60 is specifically about Zion
 another name for Jerusalem.
 Not only will the people of Judah return
 but foreigners will come
 not as conquerors but as servants
 they will come and worship Zion
 and bring gifts
 and they will marvel at the beauty of Zion.

Parts of this chapter remind us of Revelation
 of the New Jerusalem that will be built in heaven
 verse 19

*The sun will no more be your light by day
 nor will the brightness of the moon
 shine on you*

*For the LORD will be your everlasting light
 and your God will be your glory.*

And of course they got it wrong.

Zion's glory restored
 The faith of the centurion

Second Sunday
 after the Epiphany

Isaiah 60. 9 - 22
 Matthew 8. 5 - 13

There was an expectation,
through such prophecies
that Zion would be great
and it is still true today in Israel.

There is a Zionism,
which glorifies Jerusalem and Israel
but forgets the glory of the LORD.
Faith in the nation, not faith in God.

Isaiah 60 will be fulfilled
at the end of the age
when the LORD establishes his kingdom.
It was partly fulfilled in Jesus at his first coming.
It was fulfilled in a tiny way
with the return from exile.

But the glory, clear from verse 19
is the glory of God, not the glory of Zion.

And the prophecy of foreigners coming to worship.
Israel took this to mean
that Israel would rule the world
and the Gentiles would serve them -
a reversal of their present fortunes.

In truth, foreigners would come -
but to worship God - alongside the Jews.
The special place of Israel is to be the first
in the service and worship of God.
They thought they would get their revenge
and of course that is not part of God's plan
because revenge is not in God's heart.
He is a God of Grace, a God of forgiveness
a God of acceptance.

We see this in the Matthew story;
it is part of New Testament revelation
that the gospel began with the Jews
but it is for all peoples.

Saint Paul,
who saw himself as Apostle to the Gentiles
put it more bluntly.

It is the rejection of the Jews by God
(because of their rejection of the gospel)
that allowed the Gentiles to come in.
(Of course he still expected the Jews
to come back in on a second wave,
as they saw and repented.)

But this wasn't new in Paul.
It was an important part of Jesus' ministry.

Look at this story of a healing.

The one asking is a Centurion, a Roman, a Gentile.
Hated by the orthodox Jews
top of their hit-list when God's kingdom came in.

After his conversation with Jesus,
Jesus says to those following him (verse 11)

I tell you the truth ...

That's an important saying coming up
rooted in the very nature of God
and his mission to men

*I tell you the truth,
I have not found anyone of Israel
with such great faith.*

*I say to you that many will come
from the east and from the west,
and will take their places at the feast
with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
in the kingdom of heaven.
But the subjects of the kingdom
will be thrown outside,
into the darkness,
where there will be weeping
and gnashing of teeth.*

It is the same language as Paul
Jews out — Gentiles in, in their place.

Whatever this Roman had to say
was of the very essence of Jesus' mission.
Even Jesus was taken by surprise.
verse 10

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished.

So what did the Roman say.
He called Jesus "Lord".
It could have been no more than "Sir"
but even that is remarkable,
for a Roman, and an officer
to address a Jew in this way.

- Jesus is Lord

Then he says

I do not deserve ...

He understands about grace!

Even we have trouble with that.

How many times do I hear people in need saying
"What did I / we do to deserve this?"

- God's grace is for the undeserving!

Just say the word ...

- Jesus has authority over sickness.

His deference to Jesus is not just
a respectful "Sir".

This man commands sickness and evil
and does away with them.

- Jesus has the authority of God himself.

And to clear up any confusion
he explains at length
what he understands by authority.

*I tell this one, "Go", and he goes
and that one "Come", and he comes.*

I say to my servant "do this" and he does it.

Jesus just has to say the word, and it happens.

That is the power of the creator.

*And God said, let there be ...
and it was so.*

Light, life, food , warmth, shelter, rain ...

*Just say the word
and my servant will be healed"*

Jesus was astonished at his faith,
and of course the servant was healed

"at that very hour"

And then follows more healing ministry
Peter's mother in law
crowds came, sick and demon-possessed
and he drove out the demons
and healed all the sick.

I could go on through the rest of the gospel.
Because what the Centurion said
is now proved true in what follows -
not just once, but again and again and again.

The Gentile Centurion got it right.

- **Jesus is Lord**
- **God's grace is for the undeserving!**
- **Jesus has authority over sickness.**
- **Jesus has the authority of God himself.**

Here is a Gentile with faith
who takes God's word as authoritative
and lives by it.

He doesn't just believe about Jesus, and marvel.

he steps out in faith
and invites the ministry of Jesus into his life.

Who will be in the kingdom

those who hear my word

and put it into practice

says Jesus in Matthew 7, the previous chapter.

So where are we?

Week by week we hear God's word.
And I trust we hear it and believe it.

But we have to do it.

It is not enough to say
"but that is the way we live".

God's word is alive and active.
It is a two-edged sword.
It should challenge us every day.

If you are in the smug rut of believing
that where you are is just fine,
then you are in deadly danger.

The Pharisees were like that -
good religious people.
Their danger was
that they thought they had religion sorted.
They already did what was required
all they had to do was keep it up.
They did not need to be challenged
by the word of God
just confirmed in their current lifestyle.

I try to live the way God calls
I believe you are the same.
But I am constantly challenged by God's word.

I cannot prepare a sermon
without beating my own breast.

Mea Culpa - I am at fault.

The older I get, the more clear that fact becomes.

Do you remember the story of Jesus
with the woman caught in adultery. (John 8. 3-11)
Jesus said,

*If any of you is without sin
let him be the first to throw stone at her.*

*Those who heard began to go away
one at a time
the older ones first,
until only Jesus was left.*

Who among us is without sin.
Not one - only Jesus.

We all have words to hear
and things to do.

- **But God's grace is for the undeserving.**

and the subjects of the kingdom
will be thrown outside.

Be open to hear God's word,
be open to have your life changed, even now,
and God will speak his word to you.

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