I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.
The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: "Surely I will no longer give your corn as food for your enemies; and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine, for which you have labored.
But those who have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; those who have brought it together shall drink it in My holy courts."
Go through, Go through the gates!
Prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway!
Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples!
Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world:
"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your Salvation is coming;
Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.'"
And they shall call them, "The Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD", and you shall be called, "Sought Out," "A City Not Forsaken." [Isaiah 62:6-12]

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The subject of the prophet's words is the Church. This comes in the middle of Isaiah's preaching about the true, Godly life because one of the essential things about the Godly life is knowing who you are in relation to God and where He says you belong, and it's in this Church. The Godly man is numbered among the blessed citizenry called, *"the Holy People," "the Redeemed of the LORD."* These are the names that reveal what God does for us and where we can expect to find Him: *"Sought Out," "A City Not Forsaken."*

You become a citizen of *"A City Not Forsaken"*, a *"Holy People"* through God's seeking you out and bringing you home. But, rehabilitation is not God's way of making you His holy people; death and resurrection are. You, sinner that you are, can't be reformed or twelve-stepped into any kind of *"wholeness"* that outfits you to be, *"the Redeemed of the LORD."* The way of God's dealing with you in this fallen world is dying and rising, *"He kills and He makes alive, He brings down to hell and He raises up again."*

The death and resurrection of Jesus, and the death and resurrection of you by your baptism into Christ, are where the spiritual action is. The original temptation and sin of Adam and Eve was to reach into the middle, pluck the fruit from the tree, the place where God gave out the gifts. Their desire was to be gods in place of God, to stand in God's place making the decisions about matters of life and death. But matters of life and death are God's domain, not ours. With Christ in the center, you must give up control, and that means you must give up control over matters of life and death. It means you must die. You must lose your lives in the death of Jesus to save them, and anyone who would hold on to life on his own terms will inevitably lose his life altogether. To quote John the Baptizer, you must decrease, and the Word of God, Jesus Christ, must increase.

But you want none of that. You'd prefer Jesus come alongside you and improve you, your gimpy foot, your cheating heart. You want to sleep at night confident that you've taken several steps forward. You want to reach the end of your lives seeing that you've accomplished something of lasting significance and worth, to know that you were worth something. In all of these scenarios, however, Jesus is a means to an end (a very personal, therapeutic end: feeling better about ourselves). But thinking Jesus is the means to an end will be the death of you.

Jesus upends your hopes and dreams, intruding into your lives with such force that what you thought was important He kills so new life is born in its place. Jesus didn't come to improve you, or make all your dreams come true. Jesus came to raise the dead. He didn't come to teach the teachable, improve the improvable, or reform the reformable. None of those things work. As long as the church thinks it's in the life business instead of the death business, it will constantly clamor after every tool to improve life and it will judge its success in the way that bookkeepers and accountants judge success.

This is a devilish distraction for a church grown bored with this bloody business of dying and rising. The *"holy people,"* the daughter of Zion has two basic tasks that are uniquely her's: to worship the Father in the Spirit and in the Truth - Jesus Christ the Truth become flesh - and to disciple the nations by baptizing and teaching. To worship and to make worshipers.

While all religious people worship, it doesn't follow that all worship is in Spirit and Truth. Worship can be false if directed at a false god or to the true God in a false way. Only worship that is interchangeable with faith in Jesus Christ, that is on the receiving end of God's blessings in Jesus Christ, can rightly be called worship in Spirit and Truth. And the thing is, worship in Spirit and Truth is decidedly *"unreligious."* It doesn't seek to earn God's favor, but revels in the divine favor that is already ours in Jesus Christ. Christian worship is not our reaching up to God, but God's reaching down to us through the priesthood of Jesus and our being drawn into His death and life most definitely, as a fact, through baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper.

You see, brothers, the Christian faith deals in definite facts. Faith requires a solid object to which to cling, and it is an objective fact that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; that He is the Life, the Light, and the Savior of the world, with no qualifying ifs, ands, or buts about it. It is an objective fact that Jesus rose bodily from the dead on the third day, and He has the nail marks to prove it. It is an objective fact that He now rules over all things at the right hand of the Father. It is an objective fact that, *"Baptism now saves you."* It is an objective fact that the bread of the Lord's Supper is the Body of Christ, and the wine of the Lord's Supper is His blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Faith doesn't make these things true; faith trusts that these things are true.

This side of salvation is sometimes a bitter pill for religious types to swallow. We'd prefer a God who redeems the redeemable and saves the salvageable – good, church-going Christian-types. But that's the scandal of the cross the apostle Paul refers to. That's the real scandal of

forgiveness. Not that another sinner is pronouncing forgiveness but that God actually justifies the ungodly and forgives the sinner in the death of His Son. As the New Testament repeatedly teaches, Christ died for all people and rose from the dead one time for all time. In the forgiveness of sins the Church lays this once for all on people, one time for all time death of the Lamb before you, and says, *"Listen, God is talking to you, here and now. Christ died for you. Believe it!"*

Christian worship then is a two way street. The worshipper is acted upon and the worshipper acts. We sometimes call it *"sacrament"* (God's giving to us) and *"sacrifice"* (our giving to God). The Liturgy is God's Word in action and the actions of those in whom the Word of God has had its way.

The living and active Word of God is a word of both Law and Gospel, a Word that both kills and makes alive. It tears down the religion of the old Adam, the religion of the self that would have us to be gods in place of God, and it reconstructs true worshippers who worship the Father in Spirit and in the Truth. The Word upends every attempt on our part to co-opt God to our agenda or to bribe Him with our good behavior. God sets the agenda in worship. *"Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand."* The God who has spoken is the God who speaks, and we are given ears to hear. The sinner, paralyzed and helpless in sin and death, hears the one needful Word that will raise him from his mat. *"Your sins are forgiven you."*

The worship of *"the daughter of Zion"* doesn't begin with you but with the One who is worshipped, not with your faith, but with the Object of faith - the crucified, risen, and reigning Lord Jesus Christ. Begin worship with, *"We make our beginning in the Name of the Father…"* or *"Lord, we just want to worship you,"* and you've missed the point completely. *The Redeemed of the LORD* begin their praise and thanks with God, who has caused His Salvation to dwell among you in Jesus Christ, and who wishes to serve you with the gifts of His salvation both today and forever because *His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.*

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.