

GOD'S GRACIOUS COMMAND: RISE UP!

51 ¹⁷Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of Jehovah the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to the dregs the goblet [of wine] that makes men stagger. ¹⁸Of all the sons whom she bore there is none to guide her; of all the sons whom she raised there is none to take her by the hand. ¹⁹These two calamities have come upon you—who can comfort you?—ruin and destruction, famine and the sword [of war]. How can I comfort you? ²⁰Your sons have fainted; they lie [helpless] at the head of every street, like an antelope [caught] in a net. They are filled with the wrath of Jehovah, the rebuke of your God. ²¹Therefore, hear this, you who are afflicted, you who are drunk—but not with wine. ²²This is what your Lord Jehovah says, your God who defends his people: See, I have taken out of your hand the cup [of wine] that made you stagger, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink from it again. ²³I will put it into the hands of your tormentors, those who have commanded you, Lie down, so that we may walk over you! You offered them your back like the ground, like the street, for them to walk over.

52 Awake, awake, O Zion! Clothe yourself with strength! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. From now on the uncircumcised and the [morally] defiled will no longer enter into you. ²Shake the dust off yourself. Rise up and sit [on your throne], O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains around your neck, O captive daughter of Zion!—³for this is what Jehovah says, You were sold for nothing, [therefore,] you will be redeemed without money. ⁴This is what the Lord Jehovah says, At first my people went down to Egypt in order to temporarily live there; and then the Assyrians oppressed them for no [just] reason. ⁵Now therefore, what am I doing here, says Jehovah, seeing that my people have been taken away without reimbursement? Those who rule over them howl [with glee], declares Jehovah, and my name is continually blasphemed all day long. ⁶Therefore, my people shall know my name. Therefore, on the day [I act they shall know] that I am the one who says, Here I am!

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good news of blessing, who proclaims salvation, who announces to Zion, Your God reigns! ⁸Listen! Your watchmen raise their voices; together they shout for joy. When Jehovah returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. ⁹Burst out with joy, sing together, you ruins of Jerusalem; because Jehovah has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem! ¹⁰Jehovah will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the salvation [provided by] our God. ¹¹Depart, depart; go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out of her midst! Cleanse yourselves, you who carry the vessels of Jehovah! ¹²But you will not leave in haste, neither will you depart in flight; because Jehovah will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearguard. (Isa. 51:17-52:12)

Introduction

For sixteen years John Joseph Kovacs lived in a tunnel. Along with a few other squatters who called themselves “the mole people,” John lived underground in an abandoned railroad tunnel in New York.

When Amtrak bought the tunnel and prepared to reopen it, John was forced to look for another place to live.

John Kovacs became the first person chosen for a new program designed to “transform homeless people into homesteaders.” After spending a third of his life living in a railroad tunnel, John Joseph Kovacs left his underground existence to become an organic farmer in upstate New York. He was quoted as saying, “The air will be better up there. I’m not going to miss the tunnel. I’m not coming back.” (*Our Daily Bread*, 3/20/92)

We must realize that every true child of God is called to a similar experience: as a Christian, you are called to leave behind a dark, sinful “underground existence,” for a new life of holiness and glory. The LORD issues His gracious command to Rise Up, and we must respond to that command in faith and obedience.

I. Rise Up, from Degradation! (Isa. 51:17-23)

Jerusalem (representing the Old Testament people of God) is portrayed as a woman lying in the gutter in a drunken stupor (vs. 17.) As the text indicates, she is not drunk with wine, but with the cup of God’s wrath—she has received the judgment of God for her sins. The LORD has caused her to drink the cup of His wrath in full measure. Thus, because of her sins and the consequence of those sins, she now finds herself in a disgraceful and pitiable condition.

Jerusalem is further portrayed as a woman who has been utterly abandoned by her children (vs. 18.) She finds herself alone in her drunken, deplorable condition with no one to help her; none of her children come to help their mother to her feet to guide her home. The worst of calamities has befallen the city of God and she is beyond the possibility of human comfort and consolation—the city (representing the entire nation) has suffered desolation and destruction, the means of her destruction has been famine (resulting from enemy siege) and the sword of war. What has become of her sons? They have fainted, they lie like exhausted antelope captured in the hunter’s trap, *“They are filled with the wrath of Jehovah, the rebuke of your God”* (vs. 20b.)

But the LORD comes to Jerusalem in her deplorable condition and He issues His gracious command: *“Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem”* (vs. 17a.) Since there is none other to do so, the LORD Himself *“defends His people”* (vs. 22.) The LORD is our Advocate, our defense attorney—not protesting our innocence, but pleading His own blood on our behalf as the atoning sacrifice for our sins to satisfy the righteous demands of the law of God, note 1 John 2:1b-2a, *“we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One; ²and he is the propitiation for our sins.”* A “propitiation” is a sacrifice that satisfies the divine justice and appeases the divine indignation against the sinner.

The LORD now declares, *“See, I have taken out of your hand the cup [of wine] that made you stagger, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink from it again”* (vs. 22b.) God can justly do so because He has given that cup of righteous judgment to His own Son to drink on behalf of all who believe in Him: *“And [Jesus] went forward a little way and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’”* (Matt. 26:39.) Christ has drunk that cup for us, and we have drunk it in Christ, note Galatians 2: 20, *“I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Christian, by the atoning work of Christ, God has removed from us the curse of our sins and He desires to remove us from the degradation of our sins. Christian, God graciously commands you to Rise Up out of degradation:

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life ... ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we should no longer be slaves to sin ... ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness ... ¹⁹... Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. (Rom. 6:2-4, 6,12-13,19b)

II. Rise Up, to Glory! (Isa. 52:1-2)

Zion is now summoned, *“Clothe yourself with strength! Put on your beautiful garments”* (Isa. 52:1.) Zion has lay silent in a drunken stupor, but now she is commanded to put on her strength—she is able to do so because the LORD imparts His own divine strength to His people, enabling us to respond in obedience to His commandments, note Isaiah 40:28b-29,

The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint; neither does he become weary. No one can fathom his understanding. ²⁹He gives strength to the weary; and he imparts power to the one who has no might. (Isa. 40:28b, 29)

Zion is commanded to put on her beautiful garments—the garments of righteousness that are in keeping with her identity as *“the holy city.”* Zion is to put on her beautiful garments of holiness so that she might become a fit bride for her Lord and a fit dwelling place for His holy presence:

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water by the word—²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in glory, without blemish or wrinkle or any other such thing, but being holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25-27)

Just as Zion is called to be holy so that she might be the fit dwelling place for her Lord and God; so, we are also informed that all who are unholy and remain in that state shall finally be removed from the holy city of God: *"From now on the uncircumcised and the [morally] defiled will no longer enter into you"* (52:1b.)

At the command of the LORD, Zion is to throw off her chains and assume her place upon the throne (vs. 2.) Babylon, representative of the secular kingdom of man, is commanded to evacuate the throne and sit in the dust: *"Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon! Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no longer be called tender and delicate"* (Isa. 47:1.) Zion, representing the people of God, is commanded to shake herself from the dust and occupy the throne. In Revelation 3:21, the Lord Jesus elaborates on this divine command: *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."*

The LORD not only commands Zion to get up out of the gutter, He also commands her to occupy a place of honor, and He further commands her to dress appropriately in royal robes of splendor. Christian, by virtue of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, God calls us to a life of holiness and glory: *"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'"* (1 Pet.1:14-16.)

Christian, God graciously commands you to Rise Up to the glory of holiness. Let us understand that the new life of righteousness—exhibiting the beauty and glory of holiness—is not an option; on the contrary, it is the whole purpose and goal of our redemption: *"you are 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people appointed to be [God's] own possession, so that you might display the virtues of him' who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1Pet. 2:9.)

III. Rise Up, because Your God Reigns! (Isa. 52:3-12)

In the latter part of Isaiah 52:2 the LORD commands His people to throw off their chains—the chains that bound them and held them in captivity. But how could they heed that commandment? How could they successfully resist their mighty conqueror? How could they throw off their chains of captivity and walk away in freedom?

Verse 3 explains that this great transformation from bondage to freedom takes place solely by the power of the sovereign God who is the Lord of creation and history: *“this is what Jehovah says, ‘You were sold for nothing, [therefore,] you will be redeemed without money.’*” The point being made is that the LORD is not in debt to, nor under obligation to, any person or power. By way of illustration, the LORD did not have to humbly appeal to the United Nations to secure the release of His people from their Babylonian captivity. All rights reside with Him, all obligations are owed to Him—and every debt His people have incurred has been paid by Him.

In verses 4-6 the LORD further elaborates upon His rightful claim to His people and His determination to redeem them and restore them to Himself. It was the LORD who sent His people down to Egypt *“to temporarily live there.”* That is to say, He was not permanently consigning them to Egyptian bondage; they were to be only temporary sojourners there until the LORD brought them back to the Promised Land of Canaan (vs. 4b.) At a later date in their history, after their return from Egypt, the Assyrians oppressed His people (vs. 4c.) This, too, was at the command of the LORD, intended as a chastisement for the sins of His people, note Isaiah 10:5-6,

O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my indignation! ⁶¹I will send him against a godless nation. I will commission him against a people who incite my wrath, to seize the spoil and snatch the prey, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. (Isa. 10:5-6)

Now the LORD beholds His people subjected to captivity by the Babylonian empire. He sees how their oppressors rule over them with glee, and that the LORD’s great Name is being blasphemed. Therefore, the LORD will act (vs. 5-6.) *“Therefore, my people shall know my name;”* when the LORD acts with sovereign, almighty power to release His people, they shall in that day know what it means that the LORD is God and that He is their God.

Verses 7-10 look forward from Isaiah’s perspective to that day of redemption and restoration from the Babylonian captivity, and at the same time envision that redemption as a type, or model, of the final redemption of God’s people. The watchmen are posted upon the top of the walls, looking for and yearning for the coming of their Lord and Savior (vs. 8.) Those watchmen now see messengers approaching with good news for Zion, good news of peace and salvation, and that message is summed up in the one great proclamation, *“Your God reigns!”* (vs. 7.) Because the LORD reigns He is able to fulfill all His promises and effect the release and restoration of His people. The watchmen are informed that they themselves shall see the LORD coming for the salvation of His people, and upon witnessing His work of redemption they and all His people shall burst forth into songs of joy and praise (vs. 8b-9.) Just as all the world witnessed the release of God’s people from their Babylonian captivity, so when He returns in glory at the end of the age for the consummation of His people’s

redemption, *“all the ends of the earth will see the salvation [provided by] our God”*—the salvation that He alone can effect and will enact for those who have trusted in Him (vs. 10.)

In verses 11-12 the command once more goes forth, *“Depart, depart; go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out of her midst!”* The LORD’s people can respond in obedience to this command *“because Jehovah will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearguard.”* The LORD is the sovereign God, the Almighty God, who issues the command to His people to come forth out of their bondage, and He makes possible our compliance by releasing us from our captivity. Consider Luke 11:21-22, a parable in which our Lord Jesus Christ refers to His victory over the devil on behalf of His people: *“When a strong man [representing the devil], fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²²But when someone stronger [representing Christ] attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.”* Christian, by virtue of Christ’s victory over the devil and sin, and by relying upon the grace and power of His Holy Spirit, we can respond to His call for obedience.

Christian, God graciously commands us to Rise Up, and we can comply with that command because our God reigns! When confronted by temptation we must no longer view ourselves as a helpless victim, but rather as being more than conquerors in Christ Jesus:

Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life ... ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Rom. 6:3-4,12-13)

When confronted by temptation, in order to gain the victory, we must surrender ourselves and the temptation to the Holy Spirit, relying upon His power and grace:

*... if you live according to the sinful nature, you must die; but **if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.** (Rom. 8:13)*

Conclusion

Remember John Joseph Kovacs. When he was ordered to evacuate the tunnel he had occupied for so many years that order proved to be a gracious command. He was ordered to abandon a dark, dank, filthy tunnel—ordered to leave behind a deplorable existence—for the fresh air and natural beauty of upstate New York.

Similarly, the LORD graciously commands us as Christians to give up the degradations of sin in exchange for the beauty and glory of holiness.

Just as John Joseph Kovacs received abundant assistance in making his transition from underground tunnel existence to upstate living, so has God promised us the divine assistance of His Holy Spirit to enable us to heed His gracious command.

John Joseph Kovacs said, "I'm not going to miss the tunnel. I'm not coming back." By the grace of God, may we make the same testimony with regard to our life of sin.