Isaiah 52:1-6 Pastor Joe Gawel
Theme: Be who you are November 8, 2026

It has been said that if a person doesn't wake up by age 35 or so they never will. Once the big things in life are established like the work, the place, the relationships, the public persona, we can become pretty comfortable with who we are. Taking an honest look inward, recognizing shortcomings and how we might change a pattern or two is hard, but very necessary lest we calcify. Such work, though difficult, is good. Balance is required in this effort because without it, we can slip into chasing some lofty and unattainable version of ourselves which is exhausting and be self-defeating. Ideally, we accept who we are while seeking to grow with grace and patience resulting in less stress, more gratitude and peace. Realistically, this is very hard! "Who am I?!" we can say exasperatedly!

God knows exactly who we are, loves us, treasures us, provides for us, disciplines us, restores us, empowers us, and gives us peace through the knowledge that he is the LORD who is with us, who saves. God knows who he made you to be, and he delights to call you his own. In **Isaiah 52**, God isn't calling you to attain your full potential through some effort he knows you have deep down. God is calling you to recognize who you are because of him and to live in the peace and confidence of being his own.

Wake up to that! Isaiah writes, *"Awake, awake Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city."* **(Isaiah 52:1)** Do what? Put on strength and garments of splendor? Oof. Mission impossible! I only have gnarly things to wear. God is not saying, "Here's what you gotta do to earn this from me," he's saying, "Here's who you are, so just be it." Isaiah is the Old Testament parallel of Paul who writes, *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."* **(Colossians 3:12)** In **Romans 13:14**, *"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ."* To be clothed with Christ means to have faith in him, and from that faith, to be made a perfectly pleasing, righteous, heaven-bound child of God. That's what justification by faith is! He doesn't call you to manufacture a new and right with him identity. He calls you to live the identity he has given you! You're a person saved by Jesus and are blessed to be able to live like it by living love, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. This is sanctified living!

Isaiah goes on, *"Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, Daughter Zion, now a captive."* **(Isaiah 52:2)** Who you are is someone in whom Christ lives, so no matter what's happening, no matter the time or hardship, even if that hardship is stern discipline from the Lord like Isaiah references with Jerusalem/Zion, you are able to take heart knowing who you are: a person saved by Christ Jesus, who has overcome the world. That's more than a nice thing to say. That's a faith-fueled way to live in a world that will continually seek to weigh you down with things like heavy chains hung around your neck. There are a million and one things in the news and history books which fit the signs of the end Jesus talks about in the gospels. When those things happen, those wars, disasters, and terrors, you are one who is able to alertly lift up your head and rejoice because they mean your Redeemer is returning to bring you, his redeemed child, home. The world doesn't determine your peace because the world doesn't determine who you are. Jesus does!

And who are you? You're someone God bought to be his own at the cost of God's own life! Not with perishable things were you purchased. You were made God's own with the precious blood of Jesus, the offering without blemish or defect, spilled through suffering. Who's so valuable, so loved, that you'd be moved to that kind of love? You pictured a loved one, didn't you? You probably didn't picture someone you don't like, someone by whom you are repulsed. You wouldn't do that, I wouldn't either, because we aren't God. God isn't repulsed by anyone. God sends his arms out to all, to bring them, save

them, and keep them close. God showed this love to us when we were dead in sin, hostile to him. You are infinitely loved by God. Jesus is living proof of that love. That is who you are!

You are this person through all things and at all times because the God who introduced himself to Moses as the I AM WHO I AM, the perfect and perfectly reliable, is your God and is with you in everything, even when it feels like he's not. Isaiah points to Israel's slavery in Egypt as example, and then he talks about Assyria's oppression while keeping Babylon's captivity in view. These nations did grievous harm to Israel and Judah, beyond the discipline God desired to bring through these nations he sometimes referred to as his sword. Israel couldn't get out of slavery, was scattered by Assyria, and taken into captivity by Babylon. They needed God and God gave them deliverance. God lifted burdens they couldn't budge. God restored, forgave, and loved. When God tells us to wake up, to put on the beautiful clothes of splendor he gives us, and shake off the dust, it's that same merciful, attentive, and loving God saying it!

He hasn't changed. The God who rescued his people then is the God who now has rescued you through Jesus. You don't have to earn his attention or convince him you're worthy of love. God is love. You are loved by God. You are his and because you are, you live like it! We're called to reflect his glory and love by loving others. What conclusions do people draw about God based on encounters with us? If people hear about the grace of God from our mouths but don't see it in our actions, we communicate a profound contradiction, one which doesn't exist in God, whose name we bear.

We're tasked with the honor of letting God's name be known by what we say and by who we are. So be your honest self: the person who has a looong way to go in a lot of ways, but the person at true peace because you know you are someone whom God has saved. That means we don't have to prove we're better than someone else, pile on burdens God hasn't, or make them earn kindness we've received freely. We are patient with people, generous with forgiveness, and compassionate during time of struggle. We do these things, not because they will make us God's people, but because people of God is who we are already in Christ.

God is honored to call you his child before everyone in all realms of existence. You are someone God will always call his own, who is connected to him with bonds of unbreakable love. You are someone forgiven by Jesus, the Savior. *"Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I."* **(Isaiah 52:6)** God is our God and we're his people. His name is written on us and our names are engraved on his hands. Your name was written in God's book of life with the indelible ink of Christ's blood, shed when was crucified. He was counted a sinner so we could be counted as righteous.

You are a person who knows God, who gets to live him and the grace of the living Lord Jesus to others. You are a person who is given strength, splendor, and salvation. Be who you are. Amen.