

Isaiah chapter 12 is a hymn. It's a song of thanksgiving. Isaiah writes it after speaking of the promised Branch in chapter 11. This Branch is descended from the house of Jesse, a descendent of David. He is the Descendant, the Seed, promised to Adam and Eve. He is the Savior who would be born of a woman to crush the head of the devil. But how would he crush the head of the devil? He would do this by being crushed by God himself. He would bear in himself his own wrath and punishment against sinners. Isaiah would later call it the punishment which gives us peace. The tyranny of the devil is destroyed only when God's anger against sinners is turned away. As long as God remains angry with sinners, then the devil's tyranny also remains. Before we consider this song of Isaiah, let's consider some of the historical context.

God gave Israel and Judah up to the devil's tyranny. Two great empires, Assyria and Babylon, were sent by God to terrorize and scatter the people. It was God's punishment for their unbelief and idolatry. They were turning away from God's promises. By worshiping false gods they were turning from the one true God to the devil. And they began acting like the devil. Their sexual immorality, their mistreatment of the poor, their unfair dealings with those who are weaker than them – all of these injustices flowed out of their hearts of unbelief. They were under the control of the devil. So God gave them up to this enemy. Assyria and Babylon were both pagan lands. They represented the tyranny of the devil, whom Jesus calls the prince of this world. And they were unspeakably cruel. They starved the people, drove hooks into their skin, and carried them away. First the Assyrians came around 720 B.C. They destroyed the entire northern kingdom of Israel, and only the poorest people were left in the land. The following century the Babylonians overtook the Assyrians as the new great empire, and they came against the kingdom of Judah, again scattering them in far off countries.

Even the people who remained in the land of Israel were not spared of the terror of Satan's dominion. Those who remained in Judah after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem fell into even more idol worship. They persecuted God's prophet Jeremiah as they fled to Egypt to worship false gods, including the queen of heaven. Those who remained in the northern kingdom of Israel intermarried with pagans and mixed their false doctrine into God's Word. These were the Samaritans. They believed that they were the true line of the Messiah, and they rejected God's promise that the Savior would come through the line of Judah, Jesse, and David.

God had given these people up to the devil. But he revealed again his plan of salvation. The Branch – the great Seed and Descendant of David – was coming. He would judge the poor with fairness. All the nations would come to him for help. Just as he brought judgment on Egypt to save his people out of slavery, so he was coming to judge all the nations.

Now, we know that Jesus will come on the last day to judge the living and the dead. This is certainly what Isaiah is referring to. But he is also speaking of Jesus' first coming. Here he came to bring judgment by bearing the judgment on himself. By taking upon himself our guilt, he has turned God's wrath away from sinners. So as Jesus says, those who believe in him do not come into judgment, because they have crossed from death into life. This is the song Isaiah sings. So let us consider this song.

*At that time you will say . . .* At what time? At the time of salvation. Now is the day of salvation. Christ has come in the flesh. He has died for the sins of the world. He has been raised from the dead. He sits at the right hand of the Father. His gospel is proclaimed around the world. Sinners are baptized into his name. The faithful eat his body and blood for the nurturing of their souls, and in this way they are

confessing publicly what he has done. This is the day of salvation. So it is fitting that on this day, which the Lord has made, we sing about what he has done.

The first thing we sing about is that God has turned his anger away in order to comfort us. Notice how Isaiah speaks here. He doesn't say that God just stopped being angry. No, his anger has been turned away. Something happened to turn his anger away. Something happened to satisfy his righteous wrath. There are all sorts of false teachers who say that God didn't need his anger to be satisfied. They say that Jesus' death on the cross was only a demonstration of God's love. Or they say it was Jesus overcoming our unruly, judgmental attitudes by suffering at our hands. Well, it's certainly true that Jesus overcame our sins. It's certainly true that he suffered at our hands, since our sins were the cause of his crucifixion. But it is a dangerous and poisonous doctrine to teach that God's anger didn't need to be turned away. To deny that God's wrath burns against sin is to ignore what even our consciences bear witness to.

For example, if you are feeling the heavy load of sin and guilt on your conscience, how is it going to help you if someone claims that God isn't actually angry with sin? You still hear the law's condemnation against your sin. You still feel the very real guilt weighing down on you. Or what if someone tells you that God simply stopped being angry? Ok, well who's to say that he won't start being angry with you again? You need the assurance not only that God stopped being angry but that God himself was satisfied with something good and secure. You need to know that his anger was turned away. You need the assurance that Christ, in his perfect obedience on your behalf, satisfied God's anger and turned his wrath into favor. In Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, in his holy precious Word, in his body and blood, you have the tangible assurance that God is satisfied. God is no longer angry, not because he's fickle or forgetful, but because Christ, his beloved Son, gave himself as a sacrifice and pleasing aroma on your behalf.

And what is the result of this? It is that God comforts you. Again, it's not enough to know that God stopped being angry. He's not like a wild animal who was snarling at you but then finally gave up and walked away. He who set his anger aside did so because he was satisfied by the precious blood of his dear Son. And how, he comforts you. In other words, he gives you his Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

God didn't just send a Savior. He sent his only Son. He doesn't just send you comfort. He gives his own Spirit. In other words, God himself is your Comfort. He himself is your Salvation. He himself is your Strength. He is the one who satisfied his own anger. He is the one who treaded on the winepress. No one else was with him when he won for you salvation. He was fully and eternally invested – personally devoted – to saving you. He shed his own blood in the person of his Son. And he gives you comfort and life out of his own Spirit.

And this is why you can have full confidence in him. You can trust without being afraid. You don't need to fear the devil who threatens and accuses with all sorts of temptations. Because he doesn't have control over your soul. But God, who has control over the soul, who alone has the right to be angry with us, has turned away from his anger, and he comforts you with this assurance. The very real guilt you feel in your conscience, which is not a figment of your imagination, is the very guilt Jesus himself bore in your place. The very wrath of God you sense against your sin, which can't be explained away as mere psychological distress, has been satisfied by the blood of God himself.

This comfort is given to you in your baptism, where you have drawn water from the saving fountains of God's grace. Your baptismal day was the most important day of your life. On that day you were saved.

On that day, Jesus' death became yours. His life became yours. And every day of your life became the day the Lord has made. So on that day, today, every day, your song continues.

The reason people don't want to talk about God's wrath is because they don't want to face the truth about their own sin. They turn to all sort of things for comfort while ignoring the cause of a bad conscience. This is why Jesus sends his Holy Spirit. He is the true Comforter. As the Spirit of truth, he comforts by telling the truth. He bears witness to the true condition of the sinful heart. The world's problem is not that they haven't been able to find their true potential. It isn't that they can't stick to their traditions. No, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because they do not believe in Jesus. Unbelief is the root sin. All commandments go back to the first, and the sinful heart does not want to fear, love, and trust in Christ above all things. This is what the Holy Spirit reveals.

The Holy Spirit comforts. But again, this is not the comfort given by the world. He doesn't speak sweet nothings into your ear. No, he speaks what Christ has done. He spoke through the prophets about what Jesus would do. And in the New Testament he testifies that Christ has fulfilled it all. Christ has gone to the Father, and his road to the Father was one of obedience, suffering, and death in the place of every sinner. His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father is the trumpet from God that sins are forgiven and sinners are counted righteous. So the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness, not because they did their best, not because they lived fulfilling lives, not because of any worthiness in us at all. No, the Holy Spirit declares this righteousness on the world because Christ has gone to the Father. We don't see this righteousness fully right now. Instead, the Holy Spirit gives us faith to believe it and stand justified before God.

The world wants comfort without conviction. They want comfort that doesn't talk about sin, doesn't talk about death, doesn't talk about the cross, and doesn't talk about judgment. But this isn't how the Holy Spirit comforts. He comforts us with the truth. He teaches us to face judgment with confidence, trusting in the merits of Jesus who turned God's righteous anger away. And he teaches us to resist the devil with courage, knowing that he has been judged. He whom Jesus calls the ruler of this world, who deceives so many people into believing the lie, who attacks your conscience with sin and doubts – he has been cast out. He has no right to accuse you or torment you, because you have been reconciled to God through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

This is the lasting comfort we have from the Lord who turned his anger away. This is what we sing about and confess together. This song is always new, just as his compassion never comes to an end. Amen.