

The anointed saviour

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[0 : 00] Please turn to Isaiah 61. That's the passage we're going to look at.! Thank you for your prayer. If you've been coming along for a while,! you will remember back that we asked this question, who is going to do something about things?

Who is going to do something about it? Who is going to do something about our world? Our world, what a place it is.

It's full of beauty. It has waterfalls and mountains and rainbows. It contains human beings. They're not animals. They're not machines.

They're something ever so special. Human beings love. They know what is right and what is wrong. Human beings write poetry. Human beings build the Great Wall of China.

Human beings instinctively worship something beyond them. But human beings hate and kill. And they suffer and die.

[1 : 11] And we've got a reminder of that just at the moment. There's a mightiness about being human. There's also a total fragility about being human. Human beings have eternity in their hearts.

But their lives are confined to the dust of the earth. From dust we're made and to dust we return. Human beings are made in the image of God.

But characteristically, wrongly, refuse to turn to him in trust and humility. And who is going to do anything about this?

Who is going to release them? Who is going to defend them? Who is going to save them?

That's the question that these passages are asking. And I'd like to focus on that today in this part of Isaiah the prophet. So my plan is just to ask that single question, Who?

[2 : 16] Who? That question. Who? And I'm going to ask it this way. I'm going to work through it. It's going to take a while to come to an answer to the question.

But this is the plan. I need to tell you the story so far. So we just need to put it in context in the prophet Isaiah. And about this Who, I'm going to ask this question.

What are the results of his actions? What are his actions? And so who is he? That's the way I'd like to approach it.

So let's try this one. See if you can get the answer to this. First of all, what are the results of his actions? So if the results of his actions are, you pay less tax, then what are his actions?

His action is, he sets a budget. Who do you think that is? Chancellor.

[3 : 17] Chancellor. Chancellor of the Exchequer. What's the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? I had to look it up and it's went in one ear and out the other. What's the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? We used to know. We used to know, didn't we?

I'll tell you what, I'll let you off a bit. Give us the name of an old Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nigel Lawson. Yes, okay. Do you see where I'm going with this?

So what are his actions? Well, his actions, sorry, what are the results of his actions? You pay less tax. That gives you a clue. What actions were they? He set a budget. Who is he?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer. Let's put a name to him. Nigel Lawson. Except it isn't Nigel Lawson. Anybody know? It's a Sunak. Yeah, it is.

It's somebody's Sunak. And do you know where he has his constituency offices? More precisely, Christopher? No. I looked it up.

[4 : 15] I can't remember his name, but the offices are in North Allerton. There we are. Now we know. Okay. That's the way I'd like to do it. And here we go.

So let's look at the story so far. The story so far is that Isaiah has been prophesying about his people and his city.

And you remember the history of this, that God warned his people that if they didn't turn to him, they would be attacked, and then they would be sent into exile.

And indeed, after a long period of God's patience, they were taken into exile in Babylon. And maybe this part of the book is referring to either that exile or when they've actually come back from the exile.

And the characteristic thing that Isaiah laments is there is a lack of justice. And there's this favorite word, mishpat.

[5 : 16] And a lack of righteousness, Sedeca. They're not there. And therefore, God's people are taken into bondage, sorry, into the darkness and captivity and bondage of exile in Babylon.

So there's the city looking rather sorry for itself and burning away. And there is Babylon, a dark prison, captive place, place of bondage.

And there's somebody taken into chains, into exile in Babylon. And captive in a prison. And of course, the thing that these chapters get at is, even when they're out of the physical prison, even when they're back in the land, that doesn't solve the deep problem of iniquity, iniquity of sin, of what goes on in the heart.

Even when brought back home, the problem of inner iniquity remains. The quote says, your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face, have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.

That problem remains. It's not to do with geography. It's more profound than that. So the question is, who is going to sort this out? And while I'm setting the scene, I need to comment that the specific problem for Isaiah's city and people is just one instance of the whole human problem.

[6 : 55] It isn't just that it was those particular people who were sinful and everybody else was good. It is that God sort of focused on those people to show the problems that every human heart has. It's the problem for the nations.

And the nations, everybody, every human being lacks justice and righteousness. And if you are thinking of the pagan nations, they have additional problems that Israel ought to have been spared because they make idols.

People still make idols. They say, I like to think of God as... And then they make an idol. They make up what they think God is like. So there's some people worshipping idols.

And the nations experience darkness, captivity, bondage, distance, because that's the state that spiritually every human being is born into.

We're born into darkness. We're imprisoned to sin. And we're far away from God. So that's the human condition that's really being referred to here. Darkness, captivity to sin, and far away from God.

[8 : 10] So that's... Ask the question again. Who is going to sort this out? story so far.

We've had a number of answers from the book of Isaiah. And I'll just briefly recap them for you. In around chapter 11 and around there, we had the child king.

Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders. So here's one previous answer. This is a root or a shoot from the royal family of Jesse.

A root will spring up from the stump of Jesse. That's the David royal family. And the spirit of the Lord will rest on him. Now, spirit, wind, ruach.

I'm going to do it as a liquid picture because there's an anointing coming and that seems to be a liquid idea. But... So I've just depicted that.

[9 : 18] This child king, this root that grows up from... a shoot that grows up from the royal family. Notice that. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him. Isaiah 11 verses 1 and 2.

A second answer. We looked at this in considerable detail but it was quite a while ago. The servant of the Lord. And in the passages that we look at there are a number of servants.

It's a little bit like looking into the reflection in a double glazed window where you get several reflections and you're not quite sure is this the same person? Is it... What is it? And here we had a or the servant of the Lord and here is what God says about a particular servant.

Listen. Here is my servant whom I uphold. My chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice, mishpat, to the nations.

A bruised reed he will not break. A smouldering flax he will not snuff out. Didn't we hear that this morning? Is that part of what you read?

[10:32] No, I read it earlier on, didn't I? That's why I've got it in my mind. But here, this servant too has the spirit of the Lord on him. Here's another answer which we looked at just not that long ago.

The Lord himself. Do you remember when we looked at this? It was in chapter 59. The Lord saw that something needed doing. And it says, the Lord looked and it was evil in his eyes.

There was no justice. This is Isaiah 59 verse 15 and 16. He saw there was no man. He was appalled that there was no intercessor, no one to intervene.

So, his own arm worked salvation for him. This is the Lord acting single-handedly. This is the Lord acting single-handedly.

Which brings us to this person who speaks in Isaiah 61. The spirit of the Lord, the sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to do these saving things.

[11:39] So, that's, the question remains. Who is this? This person, the spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor and I'm just going to stop on that word anointed because it is the word from which we get in English, Messiah or Christ.

That's via Greek. This person is anointed. This person is Messiah, if you like.

That's a very special thing. Who is this? So, we've got, as it were, four different places. Now, what have we got?

We've got four different saviors. Three of them are endowed with the spirit. One of them is the Lord himself anyway. Now, do we have four, three, four different saviors or do we have one saviour seen from four different angles?

It's a very good question. I'm sure the rabbis wondered about this as they read this down the centuries.

[12:57] Who does it speak of? Maybe even John the Baptist wondered when he said, are you the one to come or should we expect somebody else? Saul of Tarsus wondered about this until his mind was changed.

The people in the synagogues wondered about this when they heard that person that we read about speaking. You could almost say that the whole history of Western culture is an answer to that question.

The whole history of Western culture is founded on a particular answer to the question, who? Who? and you will know that Jesus himself has a view on this.

I wonder whether you have a view on it because that is the most crucial question anybody could ask themselves. Who is the saviour? So let's do what I said and let's look at the results of his actions.

So this is, there's some verses that I would like us to look at and I think this builds up a profile picture to help us to answer who are we talking about. I'm going to say these things, city building, fruit producing, joy bringing, nation taming, covenant making.

[14:19] So I'll do that more slowly now. City building. 61 verse 4, what is the result of this person's intervention?

Answer, verse 4, they will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

So that one result of this person's intervention is city building. They will rebuild the long standing ruins, they will repair the dusty ruined cities and it makes you think, can we work back to see what sort of person has this result of their actions?

Do you not think it might be the sort of person who would say something like this, I will build and the gates of hell will not prevail against it?

He didn't say city, but he did say I will build. That sort of person would fit the bill, wouldn't it? City building, let's not spend too long, fruit producing.

[15:29] This is another result of his action, verse 5, aliens would shepherd your flocks, foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. So there's fruit production, I haven't tried to take in every single detail of this as shepherding as well, but I concentrated on the fruit production.

Sons of foreigners will be your ploughmen and your vine dressers. Mmm, fruit production. This person ends up, the result of his work is fruit and I've got a vine there with some fruit on it.

The sort of person who might say, the sort of person who might say, my father is the farmer, if you abide in me, you will produce much fruit.

It's the sort of person that would fit the bill, isn't it? Somebody who says, we're in the business of producing fruit, my father is a farmer. If you stick with me, there will be much fruit. He's the sort of person, yeah? Joy bringing. Verse 7, instead of their shame, my people will receive a double portion.

[16:53] Instead of disgrace, they will rejoice in their inheritance. So they will inherit a double portion in the land and everlasting joy will be theirs. A wonderful description of this person's work.

When this person gets to work, the people, instead of their shame, instead of disgrace, receive joy, everlasting joy will be theirs.

That's quite a specific effect, isn't it? For dishonor, whoops, for dishonor, reproach, and shame, their possession, their portion, will be cries of joy.

Eternal joy will be theirs. It might imply that they're no longer there, but there. What sort of person do you think fits the bill?

Somebody who said something like this? I've told you this, this person said, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

[18:04] Do you think that sort of person would fit the bill here? Joy bringing, nations taming. In Isaiah's day, the nations are the enemy, the snare, the bad example, but when this person gets to work, whoever he is, when this person gets to work, verse 5, the aliens, the foreigners, are shepherding flocks, they're working your fields, and at the end of verse 6, you will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

The nations are also mentioned in verse 9, their descendants will be known among the nations, their offspring among the peoples, all who see will acknowledge that they're a people the Lord has blessed.

So when this person gets to work, one result will be this on the nations. They are no longer the enemy, the snare, the bad example, but they serve God's kingdom.

There they are. They're pressing their way forward to go up the hill to the mountain of the Lord's house. And the nations bring in their riches, so there's enrichment by the nations, nations, and the nations see what God is doing, there's testimony to the nations, and you think that's what's going to happen when this person, whoever he is, does his work.

Who could this be? The sort of person who says something like this, go into the world, therefore go and make disciples of all nations.

[19:56] That's the sort of person we're looking for, doesn't it? Who will tame the nations, perhaps that's a funny way of putting it, who will bring the nations in so they're no longer on the outside as the enemies but they're being brought in.

What a wonderful thing that would be. How could that possibly be? Who could possibly make something like that happen? Who could be involved with such a magnificent and wonderful venture?

Nation taming. And five, covenant making. Here's a thing, just look at this please. Here's a thing, verse 8, for I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and iniquity, in my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Here's God saying, you know, I love justice, it's that word again isn't it, mishpat, and I hate robbery and I hate iniquity, well we've understood that, God hates that, who's going to do anything about it? Well the Lord says, I will make an everlasting covenant with them. The Lord is going to do something here, perhaps it's the most radical thought in the whole section, because I love justice and faithfulness, he says, I will make a covenant, I will make a covenant, now there's a special word for making a covenant, it's called cutting a covenant, it's called cutting a covenant, it's when you start off, as it were, on a fresh piece of paper, in those days, no, nowadays if we were going to make a covenant, we'd get a fresh piece of paper and write on it and sign it, in those days if you're going to make a covenant, you wouldn't get a fresh piece of paper, you'd get an animal and you'd cut it in half, as follows, there's that animal, I will cut a covenant, to cut is to start afresh, cut the animals in two and if you did the whole ceremony, it's my understanding of it, you sacrifice the animal, cut it into two, click like that and walk between the pieces and that's saying this covenant is so serious,

[22:14] I am so committed to this, that if there is a breach of this covenant, may I suffer the same fate as this animal that's been cut in two and in token of that I walk between the pieces of the animal, there's a sacrifice here, there's blood shed here, this is a very serious business to cut a covenant and the Lord says I will cut, I will make an everlasting covenant, wow, don't you think

that's something?

He says I'm going to do something here, there's going to be a key figure involved in this and I'm going to cut an everlasting covenant with them. Well you think who would fit that?

And then you think has anybody perhaps said anything like that? Anybody who had said at a meal where there was bread and wine being drunk and this person had said this is the new covenant in my blood.

That's the sort of person that would fit this profile isn't it? Who is it? Who is it? Well we've looked at the results of his action and perhaps this helps us to pin down who it might be talking about.

It results in city building, fruit producing, joy bringing, nation taming, covenant making. So it gets us a little bit further. So let's go a little bit further and say what actually does he do?

[23 : 48] Those are the results of his action. What does he actually do? And then we'll try and work out who is he. So let's look at the first part of the passage which talks about what he actually does.

Can we tell who he is by what he does? Now he's sent to do things and there are seven words which say to something, to preach, to proclaim, to proclaim, to comfort, to bestow.

The commentaries say there are seven so I'm sure that must be true. But to do something. So let's work out what he is sent to do. Well, this person, verse one, the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

First thing that he actually does, we're told here, he preaches good news to the poor. So he is a preacher. And I think when it says preaching good news to the poor, I don't think it's like being a reporter who says somebody's arranged something, let me tell you about it, I think it's more like the Chancellor of the Exchequer who when he says, if he were to say this, austerity has ended, if he were to say austerity has ended, it would actually happen because he's the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Did you get my point? That his word makes it happen. Did I make that point? He's not just reporting it, he's making it happen, like the Chancellor, if he says austerity has ended, he's making it happen, he's not just reporting that somebody else has decided it.

[25 : 32] And this person, it seems to me, effectively declares good news to the poor. Who are the poor? Well, please don't think he means financially poor, it's more deep than that.

It's the truly oppressed, the powerless, perhaps he would have in mind these people in the prison here, poor people imprisoned, I suppose you could extend it to the people who are imprisoned in sin, couldn't you?

and this person declares good news. Isn't that great? Good news to the poor.

The person who would say something like, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Who is it?

what else does he do? To bind up the broken hearted. He sent me, the Lord sent me to bind up the broken hearted.

[26 : 39] I looked it up, it's almost like the smashed of heart, to heal the smashed of heart, some poor person with a smashed up heart. This person knows the heart and is able to heal the heart.

What a thing. To be able to heal the heart, you know, with all due respect to sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc. can they heal the heart?

But this person can heal the heart. The heart knower and heart healer. Yeah, he's the one of which said, a bruised reed he will not break, a smoking wick he will not snuff out.

He's tender and able to be the physician of souls, if you like, to deal right with the heart. What's his action? He heals the heart.

What else does he do? He proclaims freedom for the captives. There's some sort of calling words here. He proclaims liberty to the captives.

[27 : 47] He proclaims release from darkness for the prisoners. Open, it's one of these words where you use the same word twice to mean it's really, really powerful.

Release squared. It's release upon release to say you truly free and this person at his word sets people free.

Sort of person of whom it would say he brought us from darkness to light. Who is this? Who could do this?

Who could set the prisoners free like this? Like that? this person calls out the time.

Verse 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. The day of vengeance of our God. Two things there. Two times. The year of the Lord's favour.

[28 : 49] He says I'm just thinking of Alexa. Alexa, give me a two minute egg timer. Time.

This person says the time has come for the Lord's favour. And he also says the time has come for the day of vengeance of our God.

Now these two things go together. Salvation for God's people and the defeat of their enemies. Two things go together. But this is the weakest part of my argument this morning.

You can possibly see where I'm heading with this because I've got a view of who this is all about and maybe you piece together a view of who this is all about. But this is the weakest part of my argument because I do know somebody who fits the bill for A, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour.

Have I got those the right way round? Yes. But I haven't yet got anybody who fits the bill for B. I haven't yet got anybody of whom I could say, there you are, there's the person who has set going the day of vengeance of our God.

[30 : 16] And the person I have in mind, as you'll see, when he read this, stopped short. And didn't read that verse.

So this is the weakest part of my argument. I want to try and persuade you, I'm getting there, I want to try and persuade you who I think this is. This is the weakest part because this bit doesn't quite fit yet.

What else can we say about his action? He brings comfort. It's several times said in different words, verse 2, to comfort those who mourn.

To comfort those who mourn. And it says it again, to provide for those who grieve in Zion. These are the people who are mourning.

I think their mourning is the sadness of God's kingdom, the sadness of God's city, the sadness of sin. And this has really got to them.

[31 : 26] And he brings comfort to those who grieve and those who mourn. He brings them, what does it say, a crown of beauty instead of ashes.

So I thought it was a colourful hat for ashes. The oil of gladness for mourning, that's in verse 3, and a cloak of praise, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. He brings comfort to the sad, to the despairing.

This person can heal the heart and comfort the grieving. What a wonderful person he is, don't you think? If we knew who this was, wouldn't that be brilliant?

He makes, well, I don't know, I put broken reeds, but it says, they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. So he takes these broken people and he makes them into sturdy trees.

And you can look and see something beautiful about the Lord's power to remake, to restore, to rebuild people.

[32 : 38] He makes broken reeds into sturdy trees to display his beautiful splendour. Who is this? Wouldn't we love to know who this is? Such a brilliant person.

Sort of person who might say something like, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. So we looked at his actions and they were, he's a preacher to declare good news to the poor, he's a healer to heal the smashed in heart, he's a liberator to call out liberty to the captives, breaking their chains, he marks time, he says, now is the time, this is the day of the Lord's favour, and there's another time which I, it's the weakness of my argument because I can't see that this has happened yet, to say, this is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and he's a comforter who brings comfort to mourners.

Who is it? So this is my question, who is this? Does this help us identify this anointed saviour? Who is it? Well, so this is the point, isn't it?

Who is he? So my third point, can we actually reach a conclusion about who he is? Because it is such an important question. Who fits the bill for all these descriptions?

Now, I don't know whether you have reached a conclusion personally, I know many of you have, and I know many of you have been thinking, why doesn't he just say it, because it's so obvious.

[34 : 12] But I don't know whether you have reached the conclusion, but I do know somebody who was very sure about the person referred to.

And that takes us back to Luke's Gospel. It might be worth just flipping over to it if you are able to do that. because it was in Luke's Gospel that Jesus went to Nazareth where he'd been brought up.

It's in chapter 4 verse 14 around there. And on the Sabbath he went into the synagogue as was his custom because he was a good Jew.

He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it he found the exact place we've been looking at this morning where it says, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, the recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Stop! Interesting, he doesn't say about vengeance, does he?

[35 : 27] And then he rolls up the scroll and gives it back to the attendant. Everybody's looking at him. He must have read it in a certain sort of voice. He sits down because you sit down to teach in the synagogue and what does he say?

He says, today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. What a thing to say.

God is All those things that we've looked at, all that picture that we've built up, Jesus says, it's me.

Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. I am the very person that this scripture is about.

God, that's me.

That's me. Jesus said it was fulfilled in him. Now, what are we to make of that?

[36 : 35] You're coming to this information, coming to this exercise in recognition. I suppose there's two possibilities, but there aren't many more than two.

One possibility is that Jesus was hugely wrong. And when we say he was hugely wrong, he was hugely wrong. If he were capable of saying that and meaning it and being wrong, he is a very wrong person indeed.

He ought to be considered arrogant beyond measure, mad perhaps, having taken leave of his senses, deceiving, malicious, abhorrent, and I have to say that was the conclusion that some of his here has reached, wasn't it?

Because they tried to chuck him over the hill. They thought about it for a bit. To begin with they thought, this sounds good, and they thought, hang on a minute, and they tried to get rid of him. So that's one conclusion that people have reached.

If he was wrong, that's how wrong he was. But then I ask the question, if that's really what he, if he was wrong, why did God raise him from the dead?

[38 : 05] If he was a deceiver, why did God raise him from the dead? Because God raised him from the dead. How much bigger an endorsement could you give anybody than that?

Or, or, this Jesus is the person at the very centre of the purposes of God.

That all those expectations, all those promises, all those things that God will do, focus precisely and exactly on this one person.

That he, this is the only alternative, is either deceptive and abhorrent, or he is the person at the very centre of the purposes of God for Israel and the nations.

Because that's what this person is, isn't it? He's the person who sorts out everything. he brings justice, he cuts the covenant, he heals the broken hearted, he sets the prisoners free, he makes the city to be rebuilt, he brings the fruit, he changes lives.

[39 : 27] That's who he would be, isn't it? If he's right, he is nothing less than at the very centre of the purposes of God for Israel and the nations. He's the one who brings the benefits that were described.

And maybe you've already come to that conclusion, and maybe you're thinking, thank you for being the comforter, the healer, the one who sets the prisoner free, the one who takes me out of darkness to light, the one who gives me an everlasting covenant, a covenant of the forgiveness of my sins.

What a brilliant person he is. And if he is that person, if he is that person, there goes with it a demand that you treat him as such.

Because he is of such a great magnitude, sent by the Lord, to refuse him is to refuse our creator himself.

He who rejects me, said Jesus, rejects the one who sent me. It's a very stark choice. But as I've tried to point out this morning, there are many, many reasons to say this is the correct thing.

[40 : 49] And once we start to accept that he might be right, it opens the road to see just how really great he is.

Because actually his greatness is so great that he could say no one knows the son except the father. He is so great that only his father truly knows how great he is.

And I want to say for me, if that was Jesus' view, what Jesus said, it's good enough for me. And I really hope it's good enough for you too.
Let's close by singing. Thank you.