

The Spirit-Anointed Conqueror

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Date: 04 December 2022

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Stephanie DeGraff, and I'm part of the North Berkeley Thursday Night Community Group.

Today's scripture reading is from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 61, verses 1 through 11. A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated.

[1 : 49] They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks. Foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.

And you will be called priests of the Lord. You will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

Instead of your shame, you will receive a double portion. And instead of disgrace, you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land.

And everlasting joy will be yours. For I, the Lord, love justice. I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness, I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.

[2 : 58] I delight greatly in the Lord. My soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.

As a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands for her. Can you get out of here?

Well, I wonder how many of us know the first song that was broadcast from outer space.

First song that was broadcast from outer space was a song called One Horse Open Sleigh, which is a song that we call today Jingle Bells.

[4 : 18] Jingle Bells. Jingle Bells was written by James Pierpont, whose nephew was John Pierpont Morgan, J.P. Morgan. And I don't know why, but that song was first performed in a church on a Thanksgiving service in Boston in 1857, and it was never intended as a Christmas song.

I think I just saw a few minds just explode right there. And while I'm shattering some of your Christmas paradigms, do you know the most popular Christmas carol? It's Silent Night.

The second most popular Christmas carol is, we sang it this morning, Joy to the World. But this was also not written as a Christmas song. If you notice in the lyrics, there's no mention of Christmas, there's nothing about the birth of Christ.

It was written as a reflection on Psalm 98, and at some point somebody said, we should sing this at Christmastime. And what's the focus of this joyful song? The focus is actually about judgment. The focus of this joyful song is about the Lord coming to judge the world in righteousness. And we might say, well, that's strange for a Christmas song, but actually it's perfect.

[5 : 31] If you just think about the lyrics, no more let sins or sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings known, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.

The message of that song is that when God's King is ruling over us as Savior, even the land itself, the environment will be restored.

It will be productive. And people in society will live together in grace and peace without sin and without sorrows because the Messiah is going to come, and he's going to reverse all the effects of our fallen condition as far as the curse is found.

And I bring up this non-Christmas Christmas carol this morning because it has this great theme of reversal, this great theme of exchange and substitution and total transformation of sins being exchanged for righteousness and thorns for roses and sorrows for joys and curses for blessings. And we see that not only in the poetry of songs like Joy to the World, but we also see it in the poetry of the prophet Isaiah, and that's what we're looking at today. If you want to take the Pew Bible in front of you and open it up, I encourage you to open it to page 607.

[6 : 59] These worship handouts we give you are great, but they're limited in space, and so we have to turn poetry into prose to fit it all on there, but that's not how it's meant to be read.

So much of the Bible is poetic prophecy and prophetic poetry, and I want to teach you how to read it as such today. We know that this book of the Bible, the prophet Isaiah, is one of Jesus' favorite books in the Bible.

He quotes it along with Deuteronomy and Psalms more than any other book. We know that this text, Isaiah 61, is one of his favorite texts in all the Bible. In his first sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth, he preached on this very, Jesus preached on this very passage.

And so the question today is, what does it mean, and what does it mean for us at the end of 2022? And what I want to say about this text is that Christ comes to reverse our curse, give us grace, and make us priests.

Christ comes to reverse our curse, give us grace, and make us priests. And first of all, Christ comes to reverse our curse.

[8 : 08] Let me just read verse 1 again. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That word, anointed, he has anointed me. In Hebrew is Mashiach, or Messiah, and in Greek is Christos, or Christ. And how is this one anointed?

He's anointed with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit of power that ordered the chaos of creation, that same Spirit that divided the Red Sea to lead God's people into freedom.

And who is it that's doing the anointing here? It's the Lord. It's Yahweh. And we learned a few weeks back that that name of God means the self-existent one. I am who I am, the living God who comes down to redeem his people from their bondage.

And we're told that this Lord, he's the Sovereign Lord, meaning he rules and he reigns supreme above all authorities and powers. This Lord is the one to whom all peoples, all presidents, all potentates must bow before his eternal transcendent kingdom and power and glory.

[9 : 27] And this Lord is anointing this king with chaos-ordering, life-giving power in the Holy Spirit to work on the Sovereign Lord's behalf so that this one who's anointed comes as the Sovereign Lord's ambassador, as his representative.

And what are the tasks that this anointed one has been given to do? Well, we're told three times that he's been sent to proclaim, to proclaim the good news, to proclaim freedom for the captives, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

So the first and highest priority and task of this anointed one is to come proclaiming and to come preaching. He comes with this spirit-empowered word of the Sovereign Lord so that whatever this anointed king speaks is accomplished and whatever he says is what happens.

And what is it that he's proclaiming and that he's come preaching? Well, what's interesting is he doesn't come proclaiming good ideas or good advice, but he comes proclaiming good news, right? He doesn't come proclaiming good ideas like the philosophers of the West, right? He doesn't come proclaiming good advice like the mystics of the East. He comes proclaiming breaking good news about historical events.

[10 : 55] And who is this news for? Well, this is what's amazing is that he's come with news not for heads of state. He's come with news not for the captains of business.

He's come with news not for the experts in the arts and the sciences. Who is he come with news for? He's come with news for the poor. He's come with news for the poor.

But of course, we know that poverty is more than, it's more profound than material want, right? In Hebrew poetry, you look at the parallel words that come in the next lines to define the words that have come above.

And so, when you just look at this text, who are the poor? Well, they're the brokenhearted. They're the afflicted who need binding up. The poor are the captives and the oppressed who need freeing. The poor are the prisoners in darkness who need releasing so they can see the light. They're blind and they need recovery of their sight. And this text is telling us that the sovereign Lord and His anointed King, He's not ignoring material poverty.

[12 : 09] It's just that material poverty is always a signpost to something deeper, something more profound. Material poverty is a signpost to spiritual poverty.

So, who are the poor? Well, obviously, they're the socially poor. Those of low status, whose honor has been diminished and whose dignity has been destroyed.

But more than that, and deeper than that, the poor are those who stand before the riches of God's holy love. And they realize the poverty of their own spirit.

They realize that they are, in fact, spiritually bankrupt and that they have nothing to bring to God.

They have nothing to offer up to God. Well, who then are the brokenhearted?

Obviously, these are people who are grieving the misery of life in this world. But more than that, and deeper than that, these are people who are feeling the spiritual pain of their relationship with God having been ruined by sin and death.

[13 : 14] Right? And because they know themselves to be poor in spirit, they mourn. You see, Jesus loved this text. Blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are those who realize they're poor in spirit and so they mourn.

This is the opening of his greatest sermon. Well, who then are the captives and the oppressed?

Well, obviously, in this context, these are the Jews who are suffering under the thumb of the Gentiles, whether they're in Egypt or Babylon or whichever empire happens to reign over them.

But more than that, and deeper than that, the captives are those who are spiritually captive to their own selfish desires. It's people who are imprisoned in their own pride and vanity.

It's those who are trapped in their own independence from God, those who find themselves stuck as moral slaves to their own self-sovereignty, bruised, as it were, by the shackles of the self.

And who then in this text are the blind? Well, obviously, it's those who are physically unable to see, those who were considered useless to society and had to beg at the city gate.

[14 : 31] But more than that and deeper than that, it's those who are suffering from spiritual blindness, those who are in the dark about God, those who need to be given a new optic nerve so that they can see God and see the glory of God again.

And what this text is telling us is that this sovereign Lord is determined to come and to intervene and to come and meet the needs of His fallen creatures.

And He's sending His Spirit, He's sending His Spirit to anoint this appointed king to come and deal with and to undo and to rectify and to reverse the condition of the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, and the blind.

And we notice that God did not choose one of us in this room as mere human beings to reverse the curse of this world. And I'm a little disappointed about that.

You know, why didn't He choose me to do this job? Why didn't He put you on the short list of His candidates to fulfill this mission? Well, how in the world would that have worked?

[15 : 44] I mean, how can someone like me or how could someone like you who is spiritually poor and relationally brokenhearted and morally captive and theologically blind do anything remotely helpful to address the curses of this world?

But you see, this is the message and the meaning of Advent and Christmas that our sovereign Lord sent His Son, His own Son, to become poor. That though He Himself was not spiritually poor, Jesus left behind all of the riches and all the splendor of heaven.

He left behind those golden thrones and the sapphire-paved courts in His Father's holy presence. And He came down into that lowly manger, that lowliest of stable floors, and He took our poverty, and He took our bankruptcy upon Himself.

This is what causes the Apostle Paul to say that we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor so that you, through His poverty, might become rich.

this is the message of Christmas, that the sovereign Lord has sent His own Son to become brokenhearted. That though He Himself had a perfect and an unbroken relationship with God, He emptied Himself of heaven's glory and of heaven's peace.

[17:16] Right? And He stooped so low. He stooped as low as conception. He stooped as low as birth to come and participate in the misery of our broken relationship with God.

He became, as we call Him, the man of sorrows to take upon Himself the burdens of our sins and our sufferings. Why did He do that? In order to reconcile us to God and to bind up our hearts with His holy and His healing love.

This is the message of Christmas, that the sovereign Lord sent His own Son to become captive. That though He was the most spiritually and morally free being in the universe, He laid aside all of His rights.

He laid aside all of His prerogatives. He laid aside all of His privileges and all of His freedoms. And He was born to come and take upon Himself our slavery.

He was laid in that cradle that from day one was under the shadow of His cross. Knowing that that newborn King would one day be bound as a captive.

[18:30] He would one day be nailed as a condemned criminal. Why did He do that? So that our chains might fall off and that our hearts might be free. This is the message of Christmas, that the sovereign Lord sent His own Son to become blind.

He left the light of God's glory in heaven for the darkness of Mary's womb, for the darkness of that cave in Bethlehem, for the darkness of this sad and weary world in which we live.

He left all the light of God's glory for the darkness of the Roman Empire whose soldiers would one day blind Him. They'd put a blindfold on Him and they'd spit on Him and they'd curse Him and they'd beat Him and they'd mock Him and they'd crucify Him as if they could snuff out the light of the world.

And He, my friends, became a prisoner of the darkness. Why did He do it? So that we could sing together, I once was lost but now I'm found.

I was blind but now I can see. See, He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.

[19:48] And friends, don't you long for this anointed one to come and reverse every curse in your life? Aren't you longing with me this morning that God would come and turn all the places of cursing in your life into sources of blessing?

I want to remind you today that He can do it and that indeed He has done it. That's the good news of the Spirit anointed Son of the Sovereign Lord that we in Him are no longer poor, we're in fact rich. And we are no longer broken hearted and broken in our relationship with God. We've been made whole and we are no longer captives to sin and to ourselves, we've been set free.

And that we are no longer blind, but we can see God in the glory of God's Spirit anointed Son, Jesus. Joy to the world. The Lord has come.

Joy to all the earth. The Savior reigns. So Christ comes to reverse our curse. But He also comes to give us His grace.

[20:57] Christ comes to give us grace. What is it that we're celebrating at the first and the second coming of this Messiah? Well, it says that He came in verse 2 to proclaim the year of Yahweh's favor, the year of Yahweh's grace, the year of Yahweh's pleasure.

And what in the world is this? Well, this anointed King is proclaiming and He's preaching from His favorite book of the Bible, our favorite book of the Bible, the book of Leviticus. Right?

Because every Jewish kid would have heard this phrase, the year of Yahweh's favor, the year of Yahweh's grace, and they would have thought to themselves, Leviticus 25 and the year of Jubilee.

And you're thinking, well, what in the world is that? Well, when you turn to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, Jesus' Bible, and you look at page 1, it says that God blessed the seventh day and He made it a holy day of rest.

And that means that the Sabbath day, it's not the year of the Lord's favor, but it is the day of the Lord's favor. It's the day of the Lord's grace, the day of His pleasure. And the Ten Commandments tell us that one day in seven, not one day in 14, not one day in 28, that we are to worship the Lord of grace together.

[22 : 07] And then if you read on the Torah, it says one year out of every seven years is to be a Sabbath year. That is when you're to let the land lie fallow and the earth build up its nutrients and all the land and the animals and the workers that have rested during that year will find themselves flourishing and fruitful again because they've had rest.

That's where we get our idea of a sabbatical year. But then if you keep reading on, you eventually get to Leviticus 25, which has one of the most radical ideas in all the Old Testament.

And it says this, that one year out of every seven Sabbath years, so that's one year out of every 49 years, you're to have a Sabbath of the Sabbaths. You're to have the year of Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favor, the year of the Lord's grace, the year of the Lord's pleasure.

And what in the world is this? Well, if you had poor crops or if you had poor fortune or if you had poor judgment, you might find yourself in a situation where you are in really big debt.

You're in a debt that you cannot pay off yourself. And so to deal with that debt, you might become an indentured servant to the one to whom you owed your debt.

[23 : 18] Or you might sell off some of your land and lose your family inheritance in the promised land. And so you can imagine that over 49 years, some people would come to be very prosperous and some people would come to be very poor.

And the question as God was building this new counterculture in the promised land is how do we make sure that people get a second chance? How do we make sure that no one gets stuck in their poverty?

How do we guard against monopolies and dynasties? How do we guard against and protect against this great disparity of wealth and freedom and opportunity in the promised land? And how do we level the playing field among human beings?

Well, it said the 49th year, the year of Jubilee, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, this once-in-a-lifetime event was to be the year of the Lord's favor, the year of the Lord's grace, where three things would happen.

First of all, every debt would be remitted. That if anybody owed any money to their creditors, your debts, no matter how large, they were canceled, the books were cleared, all debtors were declared free.

[24 : 30] The second thing that happened in the year of Jubilee is that every slave was to be set free. That if anyone had become poor and had sold themselves as a slave to someone else, that they would be set at liberty.

And the third thing that would happen in the year of Jubilee is that every land that had been lost would be restored. That everyone would get back that portion of their family possession and their family property in the promised land.

And this ideal of the Jubilee, it was to make the people of God unique among all the nations.

Nobody else was practicing this. Nobody else was living like this.

But the biblical scholars tell us and the historians tell us that we don't think this ideal was ever realized in Israel. It was never practiced and observed in Israel.

So do we see how the Old Testament might be preparing us for the New Testament? Do we have a sense of how God might be giving us an idea of what His Messiah will come to do?

[25 : 36] This year of Jubilee, it was to be proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. And they would, on that day of bloody sacrifice where all the sins of the people would be wiped out and forgiven, they would sound the trumpet.

Everybody would hear the blast of this trumpet. And all who found themselves in poverty, all who identified as debtors and slaves and dispossessed, they would listen out for the sound of that trumpet and they would listen out for the sound of the glorious year of the Lord's favor, the glorious year of the Lord's grace and His pleasure.

And friends, I wonder if today even you can hear the trumpet blast of Jubilee. If you can hear the trumpet blast of the grace of God that the sovereign Lord sent His Son at Christmas to begin the year of the Lord's grace.

He emptied Himself. He disguised Himself. He came undercover as a vulnerable child. And though He was rich, He became a debtor.

Though He was free, He became a slave. Though He was the maker of heaven and earth, He became dispossessed of everything He owned. And why did He do that?

[26 : 59] Well, this baby grew up to be a boy and this boy grew up to be a preacher. And one day He walked into a synagogue on the Sabbath day and He preached His first sermon, His inaugural address, His messianic manifesto.

And what was His text? His text was Isaiah 61. And when He preached that sermon, He was sounding the trumpet, proclaiming the year of the Lord's grace, declaring to everyone that that year of grace had begun in Him and reiterating to all who were gathered and all who would ever hear this text again, that same message on the night of His birth, sung by the angels, Gloria, in excelsis Deo, and on earth, peace to those on whom God's favor and on whom God's grace has come to rest.

And so my friends, I ask you this morning, are you a debtor to sin? Do you find that you owe to God and owe to your family and owe to your neighbors a deep debt of love?

So the message of Jubilee is that without doing anything at all, your debts can be canceled and your ledger can be erased and your past sins blotted out and though your sins be as scarlet, you can be as white as snow, freed from all that it is you owe to God.

And have you come here today a slave to your own self-interest, a slave in bondage to your own desires? Well, the good news is that you can be freed from those iron bars of your flesh and of the world and of the devil, all those chains that are holding you back, you can be freed to love God and to enjoy God and to serve God and you can be freed even to become like the Spirit-anointed servant, Christ.

[28 : 55] Are you here today and you find yourself dispossessed? Someone who has lost their precious property. Jesus said, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but to lose his very soul?

Our soul is that which enables us to have a relationship with God and maybe you're here today and you've lost this precious possession of your soul that gives you life with God but the Jubilee, the message of Christmas and this year of grace, this year of Jubilee is that all of us who have lost our character, all of us who have lost our integrity, all of us who have lost our purity, all of us who have lost our soul and our life with God can get back all it is that we've lost.

Christ's child of Christmas has come to make you a child of God. He's come to bring you back into a reconciled relationship with God and get you back into the family, back into the status of a son or a daughter who has an infinite and eternal inheritance in God.

And that's the good news that if you believe in Christ and you've surrendered yourself to Him, you're not only going to get your soul back, that one day you're going to be owners of the whole universe, that you're going to be walking on the face of this renovated earth and a resurrected body changed into the likeness of Christ and sharing in the family property and the family possession, the family inheritance that belongs to Him which is everything.

And so I wonder, friends, can you hear this trumpet blast of the year of Jubilee, the trumpet blast of the year of God's grace can you hear it?

[30 : 47] Can you feel it in this Christ that's come among us? Christ comes to reverse our curse and to give us grace and finally comes to make us priests.

He comes to make us priests. Why is it this sovereign Lord and His Spirit-anointed Son and His King has come to reverse our curse and to give us and to give us this grace of Jubilee?

Is it so that we can live for ourselves? So that we can live like our neighbors? So that we can live out this expressive individualism of the Western world?

So that we can live as self-actualized people of the secular age? No. He's come and made us free for this reason. Verse 6.

You see, Isaiah tells us that the church is not made up of one priest or even two priests.

[31 : 53] The church is made up of all of you who are His priests and ministers of the Lord. You've been set free to serve the sovereign Lord and to carry out the will and the work of the Lord in the world.

And what is that? I want to encourage you that it's to do for one person. Maybe one person here today. Maybe the person that's sitting in the pew beside you or the pew in front of you. It's to do for one person this Christmas what the Lord has done for you. And what is that? Verse 3. He's come to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

The Christ of the cradle, the Christ who came. He came to exchange His love. He came to exchange what He has for what you have.

He came in this great act of substitution and saying, I'll take what you got and I'll give you what I've got. So I see that you have these ashes of sin and suffering, but I'll take that upon myself so that you can wear my royal crown of beauty.

[33 : 02] and I'll take your mourning over all the misery and sin and brokenness of this world so that you can be anointed with the oil of my joy and my gladness.

And He comes to us, Christ comes to us and He says, I'll take your depression and I'll take your despair and I'm going to have you wear my garment of praise instead.

Do you see this? what our minister, Christ, what our priest, Christ, has come to put upon us? He's come to give you a crown of beauty. He's come to give you the oil of joy.

He's come to give you the garment of praise. And so the question for us is that this is what He's done for us as our priest and our minister. What are we to do for one another as priests and as ministers?

And I would just encourage you to think about one person here today who's got ashes on their head. Somebody who's got mourning in their eyes.

[34 : 05] Somebody who's got despair in their heart. And you don't have to go across the world to find that. You don't have to go across the city to find that. There's plenty just right here.

And your task as a priest and as a minister is to get to know this people and to say I want to apply to you the remedy of Christ that's been applied to me.

I want to give to you this crown of beauty. I want to give to you this oil of joy. I want to give to you this garment of praise. Who is it that the sovereign Lord is sending you to this Christmas to be a priest and to be a minister?

Priests are people who pray. Ministers are people who meditate on the word of God. And through this, these priests and ministers they experience the power of God to begin living out the principles of Jubilee, the principles of grace so that we become a whole community that's proclaiming good news for the poor.

A whole community that's binding up the broken hearted. A whole church community that is setting the captives free and a whole church community that's releasing people that are in the darkness of their own blindness to God.

[35 : 26] A whole community living in this year of grace, this year of God's favor, this year of His forgiveness for debtors, for slaves, for the dispossessed.

Friends, I pray that God would enable us to do this because Christ, He comes to reverse our curse and to give us grace and ultimately to make us His priests in a world that so desperately need His love and His care, His crown of beauty, His oil of joy, His garment of praise.

May He do this for us in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.