

Isaiah 61:1-11 AM

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[0 : 00] If you're new with us right now, it's great to have you. I add my welcome to Chris's. And this is the point at which we open the Bible. So if there's a Bible in front of you in your pew, we turn back to Isaiah chapter 61 on page 620 in the Bible.

As you do that, some years ago at Halloween, watching Will get dressed up in robes reminds me of this. I was at the door giving out chocolates and kids would come to the door dressed as dragons and ghouls and all sorts of terrible things.

And a group of kids rang the doorbell and I opened the door and they were dressed in black and white robes as clergy. And I came and I said, that's terrifying.

I said, what are you supposed to be? And they said, oh, we don't know. My favourite comment from this week came from my two grandchildren, two and four.

It was said to my wife. They said, can we keep grandpa forever? Isn't that cute?

[1 : 17] It doesn't have anything to do with this. Well, it does actually. This is close to what the book of Isaiah is about. It's what God will do to keep us forever.

But the problem with Isaiah, it's just so big. And there's so much treasure in the book. You could easily take a phrase and chew on it.

We could do this together for our great spiritual prophet. Take the phrase, I extend peace like a river. Fear not, for I am with you.

Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Do you know, for a season in my life when I couldn't read the Bible, this was my companion day and night, and God held me by this single verse.

So I'm just conscious in our busy lives. We drop into chapter 61, and it's possible to miss the flow of the book. So let me make just a couple of simple comments about the flow of the book.

[2 : 50] In the early half of Isaiah, there is a mysterious character, a mysterious figure. He comes as a child born to us, and he grows to be a global and eternal king who defeats evil, rules with compassion and justice and righteousness forever.

And then in the second half of the book, there is another mysterious figure who seems almost the opposite, outwardly unappealing, someone weak and despised, a man of sorrows, who's pierced for our iniquities and crushed for our sins, and he is the suffering servant of God.

And when we come to chapter 61, we have the big breakthrough in Isaiah, because we discover that these two characters are one and the same person.

The eternal king is the suffering servant. In fact, he rules and defeats evil through suffering for the sins of his people.

And that's why chapter 61 begins so abruptly. Did you notice that? The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.

[4 : 09] Without any introduction, the Messiah, the anointed one, speaks. He breaks through, and he speaks about himself and his ministry.

And uppermost in his heart and mind is this consciousness of his relation to God, the Heavenly Father, and to the Holy Spirit. He says, the spirit of the Lord is upon, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.

So the great work of transformation and salvation that all of Isaiah has been testifying to, to overcome the web of lies that we sow, comes directly out of who God is, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So the coming of Jesus as a baby shows that the heart of God the Father is that he desires to lift us up into that eternal relationship of love.

And so this is why he anoints Jesus with his spirit. Not because Jesus could not do the Father's work without the spirit, but because he would not.

[5 : 16] And all the gifts that he brings that you read just a moment ago that we'll look at in a moment, comfort and joy and freedom and life and heart-mending, those things are not separate from him.

You could say that this Messiah will come so that God can keep us forever. And did you know when Jesus began his public ministry in the Gospel of Luke, he read this passage, Isaiah 61, 1 and 2, and then he sat down and he said to everyone, today this has been fulfilled in your hearing.

In other words, these words were relevant for the first hearers, they were relevant for Jesus' hearers, and they're relevant for us as well. So as we approach Christmas this week, and I don't know what that means for you, we get to hear from the prophet Isaiah the words of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And he tells us what he's come to do, what he will come to do. He tells us what the result is going to be. And thirdly, why he does it. So firstly, what has the Messiah come to do?

Well, in verses 1 to 3, he describes his ministry in seven ways, and each of them is a complete transformation, and all the activities build one after the other.

[6 : 42] And did you notice as we read it, it combines preaching with tender action, with giving and comfort, stepping into the place where we are, to make us what we are not, and to give us what we have not.

I've come to preach good news to the poor or the afflicted, because Christ comes from heaven for each of us to show us something of how God values us, that he's willing to give himself to death to keep us forever.

But his ministry is more than words, he comes to bind up the brokenhearted. I mean, this is another phrase that we could just chew on for a long time. The brokenhearted is literally all those, it's every form of human difficulty that breaks our hearts.

And Jesus doesn't speak from a distance. He gets personally involved, and with his hands, he brings his healing and binds them up. He enters into our circumstances.

He's able to deal with everything that keeps us awake at night. He brings liberty to the captives and those who are bound, and the original context, of course, it's spoken to the generation who are in exile in Babylon.

[7 : 54] Impossible situation. And in Jesus' hands, you remember, these promises flow over the bounds of Israel to all the world, and they include all the darkness and all the mourning and all the spiritual bondage of death and sin.

To proclaim the year of our Lord's favour, you remember back in the book of Leviticus, and if you don't, don't worry, because we're going to do a series of Leviticus next Lent, in Leviticus next Lent. In fact, the sermon series has already been chosen. Each year we give to our artizo apprentices a series to prepare.

We do a shark tank with them. In other words, we give each of them a series, we want them to prepare it, and we give a prize to the person who wins the best series choice, best sorting out of the series.

And last week we gave out that award, and one of the artizo interns is here this morning, won it, which is very exciting. Well, the witch is to tell you, we're going to do a five-week series in the book of Leviticus, in the Lent.

[9 : 04] Don't miss it. What was I talking about? Oh, yes. In Leviticus, the year of the Lord's favour, one year in 49, God said to Israel, seven sevens, you are to forgive all your debts.

So everyone who made poor decisions, lost their shirts, lost their properties, it all comes back to them. Nobody gets too rich. Nobody falls into deep poverty.

Everything is returned to how it is. And it's a picture of salvation. The transformation, you see, that Jesus brings is both outside and inside.

And you notice in the way that Jesus brings it, it's by a triple exchange. He says to give, to grant them, a beautiful headdress, literally a crown of beauty, instead of ashes.

The oil of gladness, instead of mourning. The garment and praise, instead of a faint spirit. And the word instead of means the exact equivalent.

[10 : 13] It's a substitution. So you see, all our attempts to control our lives and play God and control those around us, they end up burning others and burning ourselves and turn to ashes.

And what the work of Jesus Christ, he comes to do, is he substitutes for us and he wipes away the ashes and he replaces it with a crown of beauty, clothing us with praise and goodness in exchange for all the dirt and darkness in our lives.

This is what he did on the cross. And the fact that it's three replacements emphasises the overflow, the abundance of his kindness and compassion. He doesn't just come to us and match our sadness and mourning.

He overmatches it. He replaces it with far more. This is what he has come to do. And that's the first point. And the second point is, what is the result?

Well, this is verses, this is the end of verse three to verse nine. And I really want you to track with me on this one. Because what's remarkable about the result of the Messiah's coming is that it's about two transformations, not one.

[11:29] In his coming to serve us, Messiah has more on view than just our salvation and our happiness. The purposes of God don't stop with us.

So look at how the Messiah describes the results of his work. The first result is in verse four. It's a complete revolution that happens in each of us.

We become oaks of righteousness. Not just declared righteous in Christ, but actually the seed of righteousness is planted in us and we organically, growingly, become more righteous.

Over the long haul of our lives, God works his righteousness through the very fibre of our lives so that we change in identity and righteousness becomes part of the core of who we are and we grow stronger and steadier and more reliable and more constant.

Or in verse six, we become priests and ministers of the Lord, which means we have ongoing access to him and ongoing access to his revelation so we can speak to others.

[12:45] This is the beginning of the priesthood of all believers. Good, isn't it? But there's more here. There's something deeper going on here. There is a second transformation because there's not just a transformation in us and for us, but there's also a transformation in this second section in how the world relates to us.

And this is where the emphasis lies. It's not just on what we become through Jesus' ministry. It's not just the transformation for us, but it's how these changes are recognised by others and then they are welcomed and honoured as attractive to those around us.

Look, let me show you this. Look at how it's described, our transformation in verse three. The end of verse three, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Or look down at verse six. You shall be called priests of the Lord. They shall speak of you as ministers of our God. And who is it that calls us priests and ministers?

Verse five gives the answer. Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks. Foreigners shall be your ploughmen and vine dressers. Which doesn't mean they become second-class citizens and get the awful jobs.

[14:15] It means they become full participants in the blessing of the Messiah and they share the work of growth and feeding and shepherding. See? Or look at verse nine.

Their offspring shall be known where? Among the nations. And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them shall acknowledge them.

They are an offspring that the Lord has blessed. This is the result of the ministry of the Messiah. In other words, from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection until he comes again, God will work through his people to draw others to the beauty of Christ.

where they too will become part of the people of God and enjoy the same blessings. So here in Isaiah 61, we have a prophecy of the worldwide mission of the church in the church age.

And this is exactly what the context has been all about. So turn back to chapter 60 for just a moment. Keep your finger in 61. And look at the first verses.

[15:22] So familiar these words. We read them every Advent. Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

You know these words. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise on you and his glory will be seen upon you.

And so the nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your shining. That's why God is doing it.

Or look at verses 4 to 8. It predicts God gathering his own people from all over the world and the world brings in their abundance. It says at one stage you'll be covered with camels. Something to look forward to. Gold and frankincense and camels. And the reason the world comes is because they've grasped the good news of Jesus Christ.

[16:19] Look down at verse 7. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you. The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you. They shall come up with acceptance on my altar.

I will beautify my beautiful house. Who are these that fly like a cloud and like doves to their windows? The coast land will hope for me.

The ships of Tarshish first. To bring your children from Avar, their silver and gold with them. For the name of the Lord your God and for the Holy One of Israel.

Because why? He has made you beautiful. And that's why Jesus uses this Isaiah 61 in Luke 4.

He then suddenly begins to talk about how the gospel is going to go outside the people of God. The Messiah comes to make us spiritually beautiful.

[17:19] Attractive to those around us. Spiritually attractive. Or as the apostle says in Titus, you remember that we are to live in a way that beautifies, that adorns the gospel to show how good the good news is.

Again, the purposes of God don't stop with us. And here is the promise that it is precisely through the lived out righteousness and the grip of revelation that we have that will draw others to see the blessing of God on us and will ultimately draw others to him.

But wait a minute, you say. Didn't Jesus say in John 15 that the world hated him, it's going to hate us? And didn't Peter say, don't be surprised at the fiery trial when you'll suffer persecution and insult for the name of Christ?

And aren't Christians persecuted all over the world today? In fact, this year thousands have already been killed for their faith. And isn't it true that on the West Coast, we're seen as dangerously backward, a barrier to all that's progressive, unthinking, uncaring, uncouth, even harmful?

Now, how do we square this to what Isaiah is saying? And I think the answer simply is that both are true at the same time.

[18:47] That people around us are both attracted to and repelled to the Messiah by the changes that the Messiah works in us. Remember in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, the Apostle Paul speaking about how weak it is to be a Christian.

He says, every Christian has a particular kind of smell. He says, we're the aroma of Christ. And to some, it's a life giving oxygen, and to others, it's a deadly cyanide that they run away from.

Remember that? To one, a fragrance from death to death. From the other, a fragrance from life to life. And that means, brothers and sisters, that even if you try and hide your faith from others, it's futile.

People will be affected by contact with us, either toward Christ or away from Christ. Both happen at the same time. Or in the book of Revelation, we have a picture of the church witnessing between the resurrection and the second coming.

Two witnesses. And for a period, they are invincible, untouchable, unstoppable, and their mission is met with unparalleled success. And then the Lord removes their invincibility, and Satan has them killed.

[20:03] And as their bodies lie in the street, the world dances a jig of happiness around their dead bodies. And then the Lord raises them to life again, and people give glory to God.

This is the pattern. This is the cycle that happens throughout the world and throughout history, between the resurrection of Christ and his coming. We witness to the Messiah, and the Lord gives to his church seasons of success, where everything seems to move forward, and the gospel seems indestructible.

And then Satan comes and is allowed loose on the church, and many seek the complete extinction of the church, but the church rises again because Jesus is the head of the church, and holds the keys of death and hell.

And often these two things happen at the same time. Question. Where is the church growing the fastest in the world today?

Answer. Iran. I know. Under tremendous pressure and persecution, Christianity outlawed the regime, murders Christians.

[21 : 14] They have reduced the church five years ago to 100,000 believers. In the last few years, there are now over one million new believers in Iran.

The church there is growing faster than anywhere else in the world. How do you explain that?

Through Isaiah 61. And I know some of you pray regularly for revival.

You know, the Lord would rend the heavens and come down and renew his work among us here in Vancouver. And sometimes living as a Christian in Vancouver feels like holding up a match to the glacier.

And it's good and right for us in this Advent season, as we prepare for the coming of Christ, to pray that we would understand more deeply the treasure that we have in Christ, and that those around us would see something of the beauty of holiness in our lives and be drawn to the person of Christ. But I need to finish. And the third question is, we've looked at what he comes to do and the result.

The third question is, why does the Messiah do what he does?

[22 : 26] And it comes to us in verse 10. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. With rejoicing I will rejoice, says the Messiah. My soul shall exult in my God.

In other words, all this blessing and all this goodness and all the life and the salvation and the deliverance and the comfort and the healing and the broken, all of this that the Lord Jesus comes to do is not grudgingly given.

He doesn't resent his mission. I mean, read the life of Jesus. Read everything he says. He never says, I don't know why I bother with these ungrateful wretches.

There's not a hint of disappointment or bitterness. This is an inner heartfelt joy. My soul exalts in the Lord. And he clothes himself with the garments of salvation and righteousness so that he can bring us to the everlasting wedding feast where he keeps us forever feasting on his delights.

And this is the heart of God that we see through the Messiah every year at this time. He treasures us. He delights in us. And so the application is the first couple of verses in chapter 60.

[23 : 41] Arise, shine, for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples.

But the Lord will arise upon you. He has risen upon us. And his glory will be seen upon you. And nations will come to your light. And kings to the brightness of your rising.

That's what we should pray for. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.