

# The Servant Of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we thank you that he is the one on whom the Spirit of the Lord is. He is the anointed one for the effective working of your purpose among us.

Turn our hearts to him and allow us in our deep, deep poverty to hear the good news which he came to proclaim. We ask in his name. Amen.

Amen. Chapter 61 of the book of the prophet Isaiah is a chapter that tells you what it's all about.

For that reason, it has infiltrated our literature and our music and our drama and the whole ordering of our lives because it describes what the world's great task is.

And because all human beings are created in the image of God, they're not insensitive to the reality that there is a great task to be done.

[ 1 : 31 ] And at the heart of that task, for very pure and practical reasons, certain transactions need to take place on a deeply personal level.

The kind of transactions that need to take place are the poor need to have the good news preached to them.

Now, it's always an embarrassment to talk about the poor at St. John's, Shaughnessy, because you probably think that's not you.

But I assure you it is. Because no matter what measure of this world's wealth you may have acquired, insofar as you have not received the kingdom in its fullness, you are poor beyond imagining compared to what God has intended for you.

So, this is the world's great task, to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted.

[ 2 : 42 ] And I know there are many of them sitting in this congregation this morning who are brokenhearted. I know that there are many in our society, there are many captives, people who are captives to relationships, even intimate relationships, that imprison them, people who are captive to the circumstances of their lives, and people who are people who are captive to the, well, people who are captive within the system, the prisoners of the world, you know, overflowing jails, and places where people are hopelessly trapped, and that they are desperately in need of something that will bring freedom to them.

Freedom to the captives. It means, it means, it means, it's not the freedom which is absolutely insane, and the kind of insane freedom that we take to be our rights as human beings these days, but the freedom which in the words of the prayer book, the perfect freedom, freedom to be the servants of Jesus Christ.

And that requires a lot. That requires that they may be forgiven, that we may be forgiven, and that we may discover that freedom.

And then there are people in dungeons, dark, deep dungeons. Some they have been thrust into by the circumstances of their lives.

Some they have dug themselves into, and are way beyond the reach of light. And light somehow needs to penetrate into that. So that's the picture of the world's problem.

[ 4 : 55 ] And various institutions and various human efforts come along to try and bring good news to the poor, but it's too big a task. And so we resign ourselves to the acquisition of wealth in an unequal kind of way, and the inability we have to make any kind of just distribution of it, so that two-thirds of the world's people economically are poor.

We can't... We can't do it. We can't do that task of bringing good news to the poor. And there are too many broken-hearted people in the world whose...the cause for whose broken heart seems beyond any human medicine or any counsel or healing.

And we need to get to them. And we need to be able to set people free from the bondage they are in. And we need to bring light to the deep dungeons in which people have found themselves.

But then the passage goes on and says, we need to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. You know, that we keep seeing the just judgment of God falling on us.

But we need to see a kind of jubilee year in which debts are forgiven and circumstances are reversed and a great outpouring of the favor of God on his people.

[ 6 : 30 ] And it says, the day... the day of vengeance of our God. And I think that means the day when effectively the redemptive purposes of God will be realized.

That God will be vindicated in what it is his purpose to do. And then just go on and look at how this chapter pours on us.

Comfort for those who mourn. To those whose faces are heavy and gray and stressed and sad.

Some of which I'm looking at at this very moment. So smile. But to them you have to bestow on them a crown of beauty.

And for them who mourn the oil of gladness. and for those who are gripped in a spirit of depression and despair there's the wonderful provision of a garment of praise.

[ 7 : 52 ] That praise is the thing that that were to be given. And sometimes you find yourself clothed in praise as you join in the hymns of our worship service and lifted from your depression and your despair and your discouragement and you find yourself clothed in praise.

That's just a foretaste of what what is to come. Well that's that's how Isaiah 61 looks at it.

Now the difficulty is you see that this isn't a hidden problem. It's a problem we all come up face to face with. And we've made many valiant efforts to try and solve the problem.

Either great empires that we have tried to bring in that would relieve that situation. Historically we've made great efforts but somehow we end up tired and defeated and disillusioned and our ideologies come crashing down around us and we find ourselves unable to accomplish the thing we know we have to do.

In other words as we look at our world around us our hands hang down and our knees turn to water simply because the task is so huge the problem is so far beyond us and our limited resources are so small and how can we how can we do it?

[ 9 : 35 ] Well the problem is heightened because of an instance of a particular preacher coming to the service on the Sabbath day and deciding that he was going to preach a sermon on this very topic and so he went to the lectern and he read the sermon read the text and he said the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound and he read that text to them and then he preached to them from it and they were carried away by the eloquence of his preaching and thought how wonderful how wonderful and because he was preaching in his hometown to a congregation that had known him all his life they said well we've heard great things of you how would it be if you performed a few miracles right here and right now and the preacher said to them well that's not as easy as it may seem with a congregation like this and he said let me just remind you that there was a time when the whole of our land was stricken with famine and people were hungry hungry hungry as you can hardly imagine the deprivation and degradation that famine brings but who was it who was fed it was some foreign woman who lived a long way away because the miracle that God wanted to do for his people they weren't willing that he should and so he demonstrated his power in the life of a widow that lived a long way away he said there was another time when

Elisha was the great spokesman for God and and the country was caught in a disease a wasting disease called leprosy and they were very concerned about that disease and people on every street beggars crying out because they were afflicted with this disease and there seemed to be no cure for it and the Lord came along and through Elisha the prophet he healed one of them but who was it it was a foreign soldier from another land and he was healed and the congregation got the message that somehow there was an enormous resistance in their heart to the love and purpose of God for them and they were so incensed with the preacher that they took him out from the gathering and they led him to a steep hill and were about to throw him down headlong almost any reaction to a sermon is helpful but that was particularly drastic thing he he he he passed away from among them he just walked through the middle of them and went his way and of course that's the

Lord Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth so you see the problem you see also the total inability we have to solve the problem because it's way bigger than our resources and then you see the unwillingness for that that afflicts our hearts we are really unwilling the heart of the problem spiritually for a people the very core and center of it is to allow God in his grace and in his majesty and in his love to do for us what we could never ever do for ourselves and we can't get there we keep going back to the fact that maybe I can do it for myself and maybe given another chance

I will do it for myself but it doesn't work the problem exists our ability to cope with the problem is insufficient the problem is too big for us and I mean if you don't believe that all you got to do is read the paper and the problem compounds and compounds and compounds day after day after day and you feel hopeless and you say well there's only one recourse for me and that is that I I look after me because that's the only thing I can do and so you have that situation and then you have the unwillingness of human hearts well let me show you what this passage says because it's very interesting the passage starts by saying the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me now these are the prophetic the prophetic words of

Isaiah that were to be fulfilled in the person of the Messiah Isaiah spoke them the Messiah was to fulfill them and Jesus came and did exactly what Isaiah 61 says and he continues to do it and the poor do have good news preached to them and the broken hearted are healed and the garment of praises is given and beauty and the oil of gladness and all the way down through this chapter you see at least in some measure the fulfillment of this purpose of God of this messianic purpose of God but you also know that there is still a great deal to be done and that great deal that is to be done is to be done by the messianic community which is the church that's what we as a congregation exist for is to fulfill the promises of

[ 16 : 45 ] Isaiah 61 but not to fulfill them in our own strength because look around you it isn't there the strength and resources to do that individually we are totally incapable of doing it how could we possibly do it there is no strength in our flesh by which we might do it the only way that it could be done is if as it says in Isaiah 61 the spirit of the Lord comes upon us and we are given from that source the strength for the task which is at the heart of our world and desperately needs to be done the source is the spirit of the Lord is upon me the anointing to do the work well then what is the work well it starts in a very simple way by which

I expect to insult your intelligence and your sense of dignity and all your sense of accomplishment it starts by saying the way it's to be done is to preach and proclaim that's the beginning so that in a world which is dark a world which is captive a world which is broken hearted a world which is sieved in poverty into that world we are foolishly to stand up and proclaim we're to preach the good tidings the good news of the reality of God's eternal purpose and God's eternal purpose is then unfolded as this chapter unfolds it in this wonderful way the ancient ruins will be rebuilt ruined cities that are ruined by overcrowding they're ruined by all sorts of social problems by crime by violence the ruined cities it says that have been devastated for generations will be rebuilt and aliens will shepherd your flocks and foreigners will work your fields and vineyards because you are a blessed land and a blessed people and foreigners from all the world will come to you and what will you do and it goes on to say what you will do you will be the priests of the

Lord you will be named the ministers of our God you will feed on the wealth of nations and in their riches you will boast that you will make known to these people the salvation of our God through the person of his Messiah which is Jesus Christ our Lord you will be ministers and priests unto God to make that message known and to make application of that message throughout the land and for you instead of your shame as David read to us this morning there will be instead of disgrace there will be a double portion of blessing poured out on you and you will come into the inheritance in Christ which belongs to you and you will be marked by the reality of everlasting joy now you know that if we go from one to another even now and just scratch the surface of our lives there comes pouring out depression and discouragement and disillusionment and despair all those things come pouring out but there will come a time when you go and scratch one another and there will come out the bursting of everlasting joy which will be expressed no doubt in music and in verse eight it says the Lord loves justice and justice will come a justice of which we know nothing and of which we've almost despaired in our society that there is any such thing as justice but an everlasting covenant will be established the Arabs and the Jews are ready to go to war because nobody can give them an agreement to which they can be held and which will hold them but there will come an everlasting covenant by which the people of the world will be joined together and their descendants will be known this is as time goes on and generation succeeds generation their offspring will be people whom it is obvious that the

Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all the nations just as you know he is to be the source of all this you know the to walk through if I can give you a little illustration from my own life this week to walk through the Oak Ridge shopping center and see the abundance of material goods and the abundance of concern for the festive enjoyment of Christmas and racks upon racks of toys and clothes and machines and gifts and all sorts of things to mark the fact that somehow good news is needed and we need to pay attention to the poor and we need to pay attention to the children and somehow there needs to be a way out of the misery in which we live and perhaps in this abundance we will find it things well

Lord God who pours out his spirit upon us and who has anointed us to be not just the purveyors of material goods not just that but to give to give people the joy of his eternal covenant in Christ and you see that's that's right at the heart of it is to preach and declare this good news and to be able to hear it not to hear it as that congregation in Nazareth heard it and turned on the preacher and tried to kill him but to hear it as the very thing that needs to penetrate through to our hearts and souls and to touch us each individually in our lives very deeply because we are touched with the tragedy of the circumstances of our world we need to be even more deeply touched with the proclamation of the good news of God's ultimate and eternal purpose which is in Jesus

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