

The Servant Of God

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Date: 15 December 1996

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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 : 29] 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, Jaughnessy, 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 : 37] 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 captive 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.

And 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, which is 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 : 45] 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 brokenhearted 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 therein.

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 : 19] 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. Those 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.

[7 : 31] There's the wonderful provision of a garment of praise. The praise is the thing that pitta 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 is to come. Well, 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.

[8 : 32] 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 do it?

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.

[9 : 46] He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, 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's 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.

[11 : 14] 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 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.

[12 : 37] Almost any reaction to a sermon is helpful. But, now, that was particularly drastic. He passed away from among them and 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.

[14 : 00] 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've 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 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 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.

[15 : 22] 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 praise 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 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.

[16 : 58] 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 unfolding 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 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 8 it says the Lord loves justice and justice will come a justice of which we know nothing and of which we have 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 has blessed that's the people in verse 9 and then he concludes by saying

I delight greatly in the Lord and my soul rejoices in my God for he hath clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness and he sees all the blessings of the gospel which come to people and a righteousness is conferred on the people which is not theirs but which is the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ is conferred on people as a robe and then you will be arrayed like a bridegroom or a bride in the finest hour and all the loveliness and all the beauty of their character will shine forth as they stand in the place of God's blessing robed with the garments of salvation and then to bring back to verse 1 the same point he says in the last verse of this chapter as the soil makes the sprouts come up and a garden causes seeds to grow so the sovereign 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 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 festival 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 well

[23 : 13] I think that's a tribute to Isaiah 61 but it's forgetful too that the source of everything good is our God and if we live out of relationship to our God then our resources are gone and we're just pretending and sometimes even in all the high spirits of Oak Ridge shopping mall you get the feeling maybe we're all just pretending maybe we're all just deceiving each other maybe in this there is no good news for the poor maybe in this there is no healing for the broken hearted maybe there is no release for the captives to drugs and to violence and to sex and to all those things maybe there is no release well those things say there needs to be but they aren't in touch with the source and we as human beings can't live apart from the source that is ours in the sovereign

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 the joy of his eternal covenant in Christ 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 them but to hear it as the very thing that needs to penetrate through to our hearts and soul 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 Christ which is effected through his spirit at work in our world Amen Amen