

# God's Grand Vision: God's grand vision for change

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[ 0 : 01 ] Good evening everyone. I'd really like to just take this opportunity to thank everyone so much for the support that you have all given us. You've made us feel very loved and accepted and yeah we don't take that for granted. A couple of weeks ago we had a commissioning service here and the church laid hands on us to send us as missionaries to Africa, as missionaries with the gospel to take to the nations of Africa and it is a noble and high calling and we don't take that lightly so we covet your prayers, we need your prayers so that we can be found worthy of such a task. We aren't of ourselves clearly and it's something that God has got to do continually for us so we just really ask that you will pray for us, keep us in your prayers and thank you so much for making us feel loved and encouraged since we've been here. I return to South Africa on Thursday and Vanessa will return on Monday week. So God bless you all, let's pray.

Father as we again open this grand vision in the book of Isaiah we just come before you and ask Lord that your spirit will be amongst us now. Father I ask that Christ will speak through me as a vessel just so Lord that we can go into the new week encouraged, revived and assured of who we are in Christ and our certainty of hope in the future. Amen. Now we continue in the series of Isaiah and this week we're looking at Isaiah chapter 61 and it's a grand vision in the book of Isaiah. It's a grand vision which spans a huge part of history and although Isaiah prefixes it by saying the vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem as Andy has just read out in Isaiah 60 for example but all the way through Isaiah we are getting insights into not just the country that the people of God are living in, the nation, the kingdom that the people of God are living in and the city of Jerusalem but into the eternal kingdom of God and the city of the new Jerusalem and the new Zion and what a wonderful verse that Andy read out there about the glory of the Lord coming upon Zion and the glory of the Lord shining on Zion and the nations will stream in with their riches and that is where the Lord is taking his people but as we go through the vision of Isaiah we see really clearly that there are continually recurrent themes, the themes of God's people, the sin of God's people. We see the idolatry that these people, God's people, they had made political alliances with the nations surrounding them and in making those political alliances they started to take on the worship of the false gods that these nations worshipped and so when we come to the book of Isaiah we see it throughout the book Israel is taken into captivity by Assyria, by the king of Assyria and the northern kingdom Israel will never rise again and although Hezekiah has a victory over king Sennacherib of Assyria when he lays siege to Jerusalem and 185,000 soldiers are found dead the next morning, Assyrian soldiers, nonetheless within a hundred years of this vision Judah too would be taken off into captivity by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and these are the people of God, the people that God, His treasured possession, that God had brought out of captivity. He had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, out of the land of slavery and He had said to them, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, out of that land of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me. He was the one who brought them out, how could they have other gods above Him when in His love He had rescued them from that slavery, from that captivity. He said you shall not make for yourself an image of anything in the heavens above on the earth or in the seas below and you shall not bow down to them for I the Lord your

God am a jealous God, visiting the sins of the Father to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but for those who love me and keep my commandments showing steadfast love for thousands of generations. Here was the people of God who had been freed from captivity, freed from slavery so much so that the Lord had parted the Red Sea for them to ensure their freedom.

He had parted the Red Sea for them to walk down the middle to bring them out of captivity and now as a result of His judgment upon them in their idolatry and their sin they had been taken back into captivity.

But it was not just external bondage that the problem was with the people of Israel and the people of Judah. You see as with us the people of God back then were born into Adam, they were born into sin.

[ 6 : 01 ] It says that when one man sinned, sin entered the world and death through sin and all died because all have sinned. And so we are born into sin. That's what it is to be a human being.

And rather than the law being something beautiful to most of them, what it did was it successfully showed them that they were sinners. As they tried to obey the law, as they tried to do this and tried hard not to do that, what it did was it actually showed them that they failed every time and that the law, this standard was not able to be achieved. How many of us here tonight are burdened because we have come in and we try really hard to do good, try really hard not to do bad, but it just seems like we continually end up in that same place.

You see through the law comes the knowledge of sin. And just like God's people, we have that same problem if we try and uphold and try and be righteous that law way. And now the people of God, they weren't just captive because of this, but they were, they were, it says that all his lifetime, man is subject to bondage through fear of death. They were enslaved because it works that as we know that we don't live up to the law's demands. And as we know that every time we break that law of God in our conscience, our conscience tells us our sin demands judgment. And we know that one day we are going to die.

And when we die, everyone knows that they are going to be confronted with a holy God. People might say they're atheists. But in Romans chapter one, it says, what can be known about God is plain to them. For ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his divine nature can be clearly seen through the things that God has made. So men are without excuse.

People won't have an excuse and won't be able to say, oh, I didn't know. Because what Romans says is that everyone knows just through the creation that there is a God. And people might exchange that truth and say, oh no, I believe in science or, or yeah, but that works for you. But what works for me works for me. But all these things are just very clever lies to exchange the truth for, to stop us having to repent before a holy God. But it says that mankind through all their lifetime are held in a subject to bondage through fear of death. And that fear of death comes because in our conscience, we know when we die, we face the holy God and that that judgment is going to come.

[ 9 : 00 ] That's what it is to be a human being. That's what it is to be born into Adam, to be born into the realm of sin. But God in his mercy, these people weren't just slaves to that. They were also slaves to all sorts of sinful habits. They were caught up in their guilt. They were caught up in idolatry, the worship of false gods. And they were slaves to these things, slaves to darkness, principalities and powers ruling over them and governing them and holding them in that darkness.

In 1 John, it says the whole world lies in the evil one. The whole world lies in the evil one. So that is the state of God's people back then. And God in his mercy, he had a day and he called this day, he called it the day of atonement. And on this day, people would fast and people would sometimes put on sackcloth, they'd sometimes sprinkle ashes on their head and they would come to the temple and they would beat their breast and they would confess their sins, a little bit like in the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee. And they would confess their sins and they would also confess the sins of their people. And after they had done that, while they were doing that, there would be sacrifices going on and they would be sacrificing rams and goats and bulls.

And as they sacrificed these things, they would come away with a sense that their sins had been atoned for. But year after year after year, they had to keep coming back and going through that day of atonement. They could never have that certainty that they would definitely be going to heaven.

What if I die before the day of atonement? What if I've sinned and I haven't made it to the day of atonement? All these doubts would be in their head and so they would come before God in the temple and they would be mourning and they would be wearing sackcloth, sprinkling ashes on their head. And so when we have this idea of the day of atonement, we can start to understand what is going on here in Isaiah 61 a little bit more clearly. And every seven years, God had declared what was known as a Sabbath year.

And in the Sabbath year, people, his people were not allowed to prune their vines and they were not allowed to sow their crops. And it was a year that the land would have rest and it was every seven years. And the Lord decreed that after seven of these Sabbath years, so 49 years, on the 50th year, on the day of atonement, there would be the beginning of a new year which would be called the year of Jubilee. And what a fantastic year this was, what a gracious God he was to put this in, to institute this wonderful thing. Because the year of Jubilee was a year where if you had had to sell your family home because you were in debt or you were impoverished, well, you would get it back.

[ 12 : 21 ] On the day that began the year of Jubilee, you would receive your property back. And people would go back to their family homes and to their clans. And if you owed money because you were poor and you had managed to get yourself in debt to people, your debts would be completely cancelled on this year of Jubilee. What a wonderful thing. It's a pity we don't have that here in Australia. I think it'd be a wonderful thing to have. But what it did was it brought an equality in the society. But the greatest thing about the year of Jubilee was that on that day of atonement, on the 10th day of the seventh month, they would sound the ram's horn and they would proclaim liberty, freedom.

And so when we see this passage here today, Jesus is proclaiming the acceptable year of our Lord. This is a, let me actually read Luke chapter four because we didn't read that. So I'm assuming, I'm assuming we know it's Jesus at the other services. We read that. Luke chapter four, verses 16 to 21. He went to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue as was his custom. And he stood up to read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. This year that he was proclaiming was not just one of the years of Jubilee.

This was the year of Jubilee. And it was a period of time that would start when Christ appeared and would finish when Christ came back again. That is the acceptable time of the Lord's favor. And it is a time where Christ is saying, you are free. And he doesn't just proclaim freedom, but he forges, he secures that freedom for us through his blood, through his flesh. He takes us up into himself on that cross and he crucifies us with him so that all the demands of that law of God are fully met as he hangs upon that cross and he takes them down into the grave. And we die with him and are raised with him as we repent and we have faith that it is so. And so Christ in doing that, he proclaims to us freedom.

You are free. And this was a proclamation that at the time of the captivity of the people from Judah, it would have been a wonderful vision to have this scroll of Isaiah there when they were finally let back out into there to go back home to rebuild Jerusalem. And so this has a little bit of a double-edged sword here. To us, we can look back through history and we can see that this is prophesying to the day of Jesus and that these words were Isaiah speaking the words of Christ in advance, the one who would not only proclaim the day, the year of Jubilee, but he would bring forward the day of atonement. Not just another day of atonement where year after year the people would have to come back and again and again make the same sacrifices, but this was the day of atonement. The day which would say your sins are forgiven, you are washed clean, you are righteous before the living God because that is what

I have done for you. And that's why Isaiah says here, that's why he says, and Jesus says, I will to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. You see, the people of God on the day of atonement, they had no certainty. They had no guarantee that they were ever going to heaven.

[ 16 : 56 ] They didn't know what would happen, whether they would commit all sorts of sins before the next day of atonement. But we have been given this state of righteousness, this state of salvation, this garment of salvation that Christ has given to us in his faithfulness, that the Father has given to us through the death and resurrection of his Son, so that we can have that joy because we have that certainty.

We don't have to sprinkle ashes on our head. We don't have to sit in sackcloth. We have to have a contrite heart and a humble spirit, is a spirit that the Lord loves. But we don't have to have that uncertainty that the people of God had back then. You are free. Now the devil will try and convince you that you're not. He will do everything to try and convince your conscience that you still owe the law something. You see, the beauty is now, we don't need to sort of say, I ought to do this and I ought not to do that. I ought to do this and I ought not to do that. We don't need to do that anymore because we have been made completely right in regards to God's holy law. And so now when we look at the law, we can look at that law from a righteous standing and we can say, this law here, this is the law of liberty. This is the law of the Spirit of God. This is the law which shows us a wonderful, loving, holy way of life.

It doesn't have to sit over us anymore. I ought to do this and I ought not to do that. I don't know how many times I get to the end of the day and I think, why did I do that? Why did I say that?

You know, I mean, I ought not to do this, I ought not to do that. There are these funny signs you see on the street which they have a red circle around them and they have a number in the middle and it always seems that I always think for some reason I should just go a little bit faster.

Just a little bit, just enough because I can get away with this much. That's how our sinful minds work when it comes to law. We are always trying to dodge around it, what can I get away with? But that's not it at all. What Christ has done is he has made us eternally right with the Father. He has secured for us that glorious inheritance in Zion, that double portion because he is the firstborn, the firstborn among many brethren.

[ 19 : 36 ] And we are in the firstborn, so we will receive our inheritance. It is guaranteed. Guaranteed. It says here at the beginning, it says, not the spirit of the Lord, but the spirit of the sovereign Lord. And when it talks about the sovereign Lord throughout the vision of Isaiah, it is talking about the Lord who has the authority, who has the sovereignty, who has the authority over all the peoples of the earth, who has the authority over all the creation and all the universe. And he has the authority over all our lives and over all the events that take place in history.

So much so that when it says the sovereign Lord, it is saying the Lord who has the authority to make sure that it will take place. It always uses the term sovereign Lord when it's talking about something that's going to happen.

You see, we have a wonderful gospel, incredible gospel. We have the meaning of life. We have that meaning. The whole world is looking for that meaning.

The whole world who lies in the evil one is looking for that meaning. And I don't know about you guys, but I had 12 years of drug addiction. And I tell you, I know what it is like to be a slave to sinful habits, to be a slave to the darkness, to be a slave to the devil, to be tangled in your sins and your guilt.

And to be fearing that day of judgment every day of your life, because your conscience is so disturbed. And because you know, when you face that Holy God, you are going to be judged.

[ 21 : 32 ] My friends, the good news is in Christ, that judgment has been completely meted out upon Christ on the cross. Completely. So there is now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus.

And that day will reveal to us who we are. That day will show us and we won't be able to sidestep it. We won't be able to come up with excuses or lies or that's not fair or that's not right, because it'll all be there in front of us.

That day, the light of that day will show us exactly who each of us is. But there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We are saved. Jesus said, he who believes in me has already entered from death into life. He who believes in me will never taste death. Others will see you die, but you will never see your death. You'll never experience death. You will just keep living. He who believes in me has eternal life. It's not something we will get afterwards. It's something we have already received as we have come to know Christ. As we are in Christ, we have eternal life. We have been raised with him and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. That's where we are. Now we see in part, then we shall see in full.

We see now dimly as in a mirror, but then we shall see in full as we are fully known.

And all this wonderful thing that the Lord has done for us is to be to his glory. We are to be his planting. We are to be oaks of righteousness. And I just love that term, oaks of righteousness.

[ 23 : 27 ] We have the meaning of life. And in this world where people are up and down and they're going this way and they believe in this and they believe in that and they're so fickle and they're up and down, we can be oaks amongst them in integrity, in knowing why we are here, where we are going, who we believe in, what the truth is. We can stand solid in that truth and people will see us and they will know we are people who are blessed by the Lord.

I know that while I was a drug addict, my brother and sister were Christians. And, you know, a lot of us think that it's, well, it's, you know, it's how morally good we are as to whether people are going to know whether we're Christians or not. And I think that's, there's a truth to that because we're reflecting our father in heaven in being pure. He is a holy God.

But what I saw with my brother and my sister, it wasn't that they were just such good people. That isn't, that isn't how I saw the reality of their faith. What I saw is that their lives had a hedge around them. They weren't rich. They weren't famous. They didn't live in big homes, but they had everything they needed. And God had provided good friends, good people around them.

He had provided all their needs. They had jobs. Just every provision they could want, I could see not how good they were, but I could see God's side of the relationship in their life. And I could not deny that these were a people blessed by God.

We come to the end of the passage and it says, 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. You see, we don't have to wear those garments of sackcloth and despair and mourning because we are righteous before God. And that should just excite us into action. That should make us want to tell others and proclaim to others, freedom, you are free. Christ has freed you. Repent of your sins and turn to him because he is Lord over the whole creation. So when we are aware of our righteousness before God, it will spring forth in praise and in a life which should scream out all the time, living for the glory of God and should scream out, thank you, Father, for what you have done for me, for taking away the penalty of sin, for freeing me from my guilt and from freeing me from the world and what is coming on the world, the judgment that is coming on the world.

[ 26 : 29 ] Righteousness will spring forth in praise because when we know we are righteous, we will not be able to do anything but praise God. I'm telling you, in heaven, when you see those visions in revelation of the saints standing around the throne and they are singing to God night and day, they are singing to God and praising his name, it is not something they have to do which is a boring thing they have to do. It is something they cannot help doing. It is just pouring out of them. They can't but praise him for what he has done. And I'm telling you, when we get to heaven, when we get to that new Zion, that glorious new Jerusalem where there is no more crying and no more pain, where God will wipe away every tear from every eye, all we will be able to do is praise the God who called us and made us righteous so we could be there. Holiness is a beautiful thing and we are going to see one day what true, pure holiness is like when we come to the new heavens and the new earth.

We can't even imagine that because in our minds is always sinful thoughts, sinful inclinations. But that day we won't be able to sin even if we wanted to. It'll be outside of our mind altogether.

We have a wonderful gospel to tell the world. Let's go and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour while it is still the year of the Lord's favour and before the day of vengeance comes. Let's pray.

Father, we just want to praise you that you are just such a wonderful and faithful God. We have not deserved your grace. We have not deserved the sacrifice that your son poured out upon that cross, taking the things we have done wrong upon himself, taking us into himself, taking the judgment for our sin into himself. Lord, we have not deserved any of that, Lord, but you gave that to us to show us just how much you love us. Father, as we go into this new week, let us be reminded of that great love you have for us, Father, so that then from that we can love our neighbour as we would love ourselves.

Father, let us be conduits of that love to everyone we come across. We pray this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.