

The Mission of the Messiah

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[0 : 00] Our sermon text today is found in Isaiah chapter 61. That's page 581 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there with me. This morning we're going to look at the first four verses of Isaiah chapter 61.

Let me pray as we come to God's Word together. Father, long ago, at many times and in many ways, you spoke to your people by the prophets.

But in these last days, you've spoken to us by your Son, our Lord Jesus. Father, we pray in the next few moments you would help us by your Spirit to hear again through your written Word, the voice of your incarnate Word, Jesus, so that we might know you better and love you more and find our deepest joy and purpose in you just as you created us to.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus. Amen. So Isaiah chapter 61, verses 1 through 4. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

[2 : 06] They shall build up the ancient ruins. They shall raise up the former devastations. They shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

Well, waiting can be really hard, can't it? If you're like me, whenever you're in a situation where you have to wait, wait for a ride, wait in line at the store, wait for a meeting to start, what's the first thing you do?

Well, you pull out your cell phone, right? I mean, that's what we do when we wait. We check our email, we flip around on a few websites. We can't just wait. We have to do something, right? Waiting is hard work. Of course, now that Christmas Day has come and gone, the big wait of the season is finally over. The presents are opened.

And the family visits have happened. But you know, Advent is about much more than just remembering Christ's first coming.

[3 : 13] It's also about anticipating Jesus' second coming, his coming again in glory. In other words, Advent's about learning how to anticipate, how to wait. It's about learning to wait.

And we're not so good at waiting. What exactly are we supposed to be doing as we wait? Today we're looking at the last text in our short sermon series in Isaiah about the messianic prophecies of Isaiah.

And this text that we're looking at today comes right in the middle of the third and final part of Isaiah's book, chapters 56 through 66.

Now, very broadly speaking, chapters 1 through 39 of Isaiah have highlighted the great problem of human sin. And chapters 40 through 55 have highlighted the even greater answer of God's grace. And now these last 11 chapters, Isaiah 56 through 66, are going to tell us what we do while we wait. While we wait for God's glorious future to come in full.

[4 : 25] The glorious future that Jesus, the King and the servant of Isaiah's book, has won through his atoning death and his resurrection. The future that Isaiah will call in these climactic chapters, he'll call them the new heavens and the new earth.

Where evil and injustice are no more. Where God's people are radiant with God's glory. Where death is defeated and joy is everlasting. That's what's coming, Isaiah says.

That's what we're waiting for. But Isaiah wants to answer the question of what we do while we wait for it. And what we see in Isaiah 61 is that the life God has for us in this in-between time, in-between Christ's first and second coming, is so much greater than just standing around metaphorically checking our cell phones.

Isaiah 61, which is the center and heart of this last section of the book, brings us face to face with the great mission of the Messiah. A mission that we enter into when we are united to him and to his people in the world.

Isaiah is saying, this is what it means to wait, to anticipate the glorious future God has in store. It means to be on mission with the Messiah, with King Jesus. And we're going to look at these four verses and see that this mission has three parts.

[5 : 57] First, there's gospel proclamation. Second, there's personal transformation. And third, there's communal restoration. So we see the first part of that mission in verses 1 through 3, the gospel proclamation.

Here in these verses, we have the voice of the Messiah speaking in the first person, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me, declaring that the Lord has given him a mission of proclaiming, of bringing good news.

Now, how do we know that this voice in verse 1 is the voice of the Messiah? Could Isaiah be portraying some other figure here? Who is it that's speaking in these verses?

But you know, as you look over Isaiah as a whole, you have to ask who else in Isaiah is said to possess the spirit of the Lord like this? Back in chapter 11, verse 2, we see that it is the one called the branch of Jesse, the future king in the line of David, the Messiah himself, that the spirit of the Lord will rest upon.

And then as we jump ahead to the second part of Isaiah's book, in chapter 42, verse 1, God says, Behold my servant whom I uphold, I've put my spirit upon him. So there it's the great servant of the Lord.

[7 : 21] So here, in the third and climactic part of Isaiah's book, when we hear a voice saying, The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, who else could it be? But that same king and that same servant of the Lord that Isaiah has told us so much about.

Here again, we have the long-awaited Messiah now speaking in his own voice, declaring that he's been anointed to bring good news. And notice who this good news is for.

It's good news for the poor, and for the brokenhearted, for the captives, and for all who mourn. This good news that the Messiah brings is not for those who think they have it all together.

It's for those who know they're sick, who know they're needy, who know they need to be rescued.

And in the context of Isaiah, we know that the poor and the brokenhearted and the captives aren't just mourning their circumstances.

Above all, they're mourning their sin. One commentator put it this way, and I thought this was good. He said, Who are the poor? Here in Isaiah, who's he referring to?

[8 : 44] Who are the poor? Those who are so broken by life that they have no more heart to try. Those who are so bound up in their various addictions that liberty and release are a cruel mirage.

Those who think that they will never again experience the favor of the Lord or see his just vengeance meted out against those who have misused them. Those who think their lives hold nothing more than ashes, sackcloth, and the fainting heaviness of despair.

They are those to whom the Messiah, the servant, shouts good news. But is this message just that? Is it just words? Is it mere talk? But you have to remember who it is who's speaking these words.

This is the king of Isaiah chapter 9. The one called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This is the servant of Isaiah 53 who has borne our iniquities.

[9 : 54] And will make the many to be counted righteous. When this king proclaims liberty, it's not just mere talk.

It's an announcement of what is now true. After all, when a judge pronounces a verdict, when the gavel comes down and it says, not guilty.

Or when a head of state pronounces amnesty for those who are convicted of crimes. Is that mere talk? No. It produces the reality that the words declare.

And friends, if the words of a mere human being, a mere human judge, a mere human king, can produce that kind of life-changing reality, how much more true must it be of the very words of Christ?

His announcement of liberty must bring the reality of liberty. So this is the mission of the Messiah that Isaiah foresees, to bring good news.

[11 : 13] And when Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth, it was this very text in Isaiah 61 that he took up and read in the synagogue.

As we read earlier in the service from Luke 4, Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah, read these verses, and then said, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Imagine what they must have thought at such a declaration.

And throughout Jesus' ministry, he healed the sick and made paralytics walk again and opened the eyes of the blind, even raised the dead, all to demonstrate this great truth that he had come to set the captives free.

That the year of the Lord's favor, grace, and restoration had arrived in his own person and work. Here it was.

The thing you've been waiting for. It's right now. Of course, as many point out in Luke 4, Jesus actually stopped reading Isaiah 61 right before the words in verse 2 about the day of vengeance of our God.

[12 : 33] Sort of a curious thing. Why did Jesus stop the reading there? Well, the reality is, is that Jesus' work of judgment was reserved and is reserved for his second coming, not his first.

In his first coming, Jesus had come not to judge, but to save. After all, he didn't want his fellow Israelites to think that he'd come to judge the Romans, to start a military war.

That would have been the first thing they thought of. He wanted to make very clear that that's not why he came at first. He had come to do something much more profound, to grant a liberty and a comfort that would be eternal.

Isaiah 61 verse 3 gives this beautiful image of what that would be like. It says that Jesus has come to give a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.

It's actually wedding imagery, believe it or not. It's being decked out for the day of a marriage, of a wedding, of being united to the one you love.

[13 : 55] And instead of ashes and mourning and a faint spirit, all the things that describe our hopeless and hurt and lost condition were given in exchange. Beauty and joy and praise.

And how on earth does Jesus accomplish that? Something so much greater and something so much more lasting than a mere change of political circumstance.

Well, as we see as the gospels unfold, we see that Christ does this great work through the cross. Because it's at the cross where Jesus takes upon himself our ashes and our mourning and our faint spirit.

He takes all of our sin and in return he gives us his beauty and his gladness and his praise. Look at the end of Isaiah chapter 61.

Look at verse 10. It says it so well. Here Isaiah is now leading us in a song of praise for what the Messiah would do. And in 61 verse 10 he says, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord.

[15 : 04] My soul shall exult in my God for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

What an image. Taking our sin upon himself in return Jesus gives us a robe of righteousness. Friends, this is the great exchange at the heart of the gospel for all who believe.

My sin in exchange for his righteousness. that on the cross he would be clothed with my moral failures and bear their penalty away and in exchange I would receive a robe of his perfect righteousness.

So you see, Jesus comes not just proclaiming good news. He is the good news. He can bring good news because he is it himself.

He is our freedom and our comfort. He is our liberty and our joy. And this is exactly what we proclaim as we enter into the mission of the Messiah.

[16 : 22] We proclaim the good news, the freedom that Jesus has won. Freedom from sin's penalty, freedom from sin's guilt, freedom from sin's power even. All accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection and applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit and faith.

that's why Paul can say living in light of Jesus' death and resurrection, he can say I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Notice that Paul is saying that the gospel, the message about Jesus, isn't just about God's power, right? He's not even saying that it conveys God's power. He's saying that the gospel is God's power.

Proclaiming what Jesus has done in his life and death and resurrection that he lived a perfect life of obedience to God in our place, that he died on the cross to bear sin's penalty in our place, that he rose to life on the third day conquering death and securing our salvation, proclaiming this good news, this gospel, is God's power.

Power to comfort those who mourn and power to liberate those who are bound. So as we think about our mission, about joining Christ in his mission today, we must be about the work of gospel proclamation.

[17 : 47] As the new year is about to begin, I wonder, are there two or three coworkers or neighbors or friends or even family members whose conversion you will particularly pray for this year?

And will you pray that God will give you an open door and well-seasoned, well-timed words to invite them to church, to speak to them about the liberty that Christ has brought us?

Perhaps a good goal this year in addition to prayer and in sharing the gospel is to read one good book about personal evangelism this year. That is sharing the gospel in the context of our friendships.

There are lots of good ones out there. One I've been reading lately is by Max Stiles called Speaking of Jesus. It's kind of an oldie but goodie, but it's a good one. Max Stiles, Speaking of Jesus. But why not take up one book that will help equip you to be about this great work of gospel proclamation? If you want some more recommendations, you can come talk to me after the service. But being about the work of gospel proclamation is more than just about one-to-one conversations. It's about creating a church life, a loving church culture where non-Christians feel welcome to ask questions and explore spiritual things and learn about Jesus for themselves.

[19 : 07] It's about this place and this space being open to those who are seeking and being ready to be patient with their questions and with their searchings and their explorings to welcome those things, to be honest about our own doubts and misgivings at times and our own journey.

So when we gather on Sundays or in small groups or in other settings, do we assume that everyone there is already a Christian or do we speak and act as if there are curious non-Christians present as well?

All of that is what it means to be on the mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus. But the mission of the Messiah doesn't actually just stop there. This passage shows us that the good news of Jesus creates profound change.

The second thing we see here is that this mission of proclamation is also a mission of personal transformation. We see this at the end of verse 3.

This message of the gospel goes forth in these opening verses with the result at the end of verse 3 says that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he, that is the Lord, may be glorified.

[20 : 24] God's creating oaks of righteousness.

In the first chapter of Isaiah, the people there were described as being like an oak whose leaf withers. In other words, because of their self-reliance and their self-centeredness, the people had become spiritually dry and lifeless and near to death.

But here in Isaiah 61, a great transformation has happened. how will we go about living this life that God wants us to live? Will it be in our own strength?

Will it be in our own power? Will we just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get about the work? No. God says, I'll produce in you that fruit that I want to see.

My grace will give you a new status, but my grace will give you a new nature. And now, as a result of the gospel, the ones who were once oaks with withering leaves have become oaks of righteousness.

[21 : 41] Friends, being in a relationship with Jesus Christ really does change people's lives. If you've been around the church for a long time and you've seen a lot of hurt and brokenness and struggling, sometimes you doubt that.

But it's helpful to take a step back and see the good that is produced by the Holy Spirit through the gospel of grace. Being in a relationship with Jesus really does change us from the inside out.

Think of an oak tree. A healthy oak tree is stable, isn't it? It withstands the rains and the storms that come. You know, with Christ in your life, you no longer need to rely on the shifting sands of other people's approval and you don't have to ride the roller coaster of worldly success.

You don't have to live for the gods of career or family or money. All those things will come and go. But Christ remains faithful, loving, ever-present, ever-merciful, ever-strong.

And being rooted in Him gives you a stability like nothing else. And oak trees are also fairly permanent, aren't they? Apparently, oak trees can live and flourish for hundreds of years.

[23 : 09] You know, we've got an oak tree in our backyard and it's stunning to think that that oak tree has been there probably longer than the house that I live in. Most of what we do in our lives will probably be forgotten in a generation or two.

Don't you think about that sometimes? But here's the wonderful good news of the gospel, that in the Lord Jesus, our labors are not in vain.

Because of His resurrection, even our most mundane labors have eternal significance. And on top of it all, Christ offers us eternal life.

In Him, you will live forever. no more do our lives need to be haunted by the fear of dying or by the many lesser fears that are like it, those fears of missing out.

In Christ, your best is always still to come, which gives you a permanence like nothing else. But oak trees aren't just stable and permanent, they're abundant, aren't they?

[24 : 19] Oak trees can produce thousands of acorns, as you know, if you've ever walked under an oak tree after a heavy wind, right? We've had so many acorns in one spot that you almost trip on them.

It's like a sheet of marbles. You just sort of go flying. They're everywhere. Friends, that's what happens when the new life of Christ is at work in us. God starts to do an abundant and total work in our lives.

It changes all of us from the inside out. Now, of course, sometimes that change takes time, right? I think there's a reason why God often uses agricultural or organic metaphors to describe our growth in righteousness, our growth in godly character.

Because it takes time for things to grow. Mighty oaks of righteousness don't just pop up overnight. it takes time. And sometimes it's hard work.

Farmers need to get up early and go to bed late. I would be a terrible farmer. I don't like getting up early. So I'm told. But it can be hard work, this growth in righteousness.

[25 : 35] But you see, ultimately, one of the beautiful things about the organic metaphor isn't just that it takes time, isn't just that sometimes it takes some hard work, but ultimately that it's the Lord's doing.

There's a confidence we can have in Christ that God is going to produce in us the righteousness, the holiness he desires in us. Sometimes it will be a much more painful process than we would ever imagine, but he's going to finish what he started.

And as a result, the Lord will get the glory. He will make us more and more into his image, and as others see Christ in us, Christ will be praised.

One of the most important things that we can do to share Christ with our city and to see the gospel go forth is to live lives of godliness, friends.

to live holy lives. And that is the mission of the Messiah, to make us something new.

[26 : 43] It's a mission of personal transformation, of becoming more and more godly in our character. So again, let me ask, as a new year begins, how will you cooperate with God to cultivate this growth in your life?

What fruit of the Spirit are you longing to see more of in the year ahead? What vices or sins are you hoping to see less of in the year ahead?

And not just in your own life, how do you plan to cooperate with God to cultivate this growth in the lives of those around you? Perhaps there's a sin that you need to confess, something that you need to tell a trusted Christian mentor or pastor so they can pray for you and point you to the right avenues for help and change.

If there's a deeper besetting sin that you're wrestling with, perhaps you need to get connected with a recovery group, with an addiction recovery group who can help you walk in the paths of God's grace together.

Again, come talk to the pastors. Let us help resource you into the help that you need. Or maybe you just need to be more transparent with your Christian friends or your spouse about how you'd like to grow in Christlikeness.

[28 : 05] The work of personal transformation is not a solo sport. We need each other. We need each other to help apply the grace of Christ to our hearts and we need each other to fan into flame the Spirit's work within.

So how will this year be a year of personal transformation for you? But there's one last element to this mission. Do you see the progression that's happening in this passage?

We see that the mission of the Messiah begins in gospel proclamation. It extends to personal transformation and then out in verse 4 into community restoration.

Look again at verse 4. They shall build up the ancient ruins. They shall raise up the former devastations. They shall repair the ruined cities. the devastations of many generations.

Now Isaiah's immediate audience was the exile generation. He was writing ahead to the generation that would see Jerusalem destroyed and the people carried off to captivity.

[29 : 13] So this image of city being rebuilt would have been a powerful image for them of what renewal and repair and new life looked like. But notice that the vision here encompasses more than just Jerusalem.

It's all in the plural, isn't it? Ruins, devastations, cities. In other words, what Isaiah has in view here is that wherever sin has brought its wreckage, there the gospel is meant to go and produce restoration and renewal.

Broken marriages, broken families, broken churches, broken workplaces, broken neighborhoods, broken cities, broken regions, wherever poverty and racism and joblessness and fear and despair and addiction rear their ugly heads, there the gospel is meant to go and bring hope and repair to make something new out of what's old, to make something whole out of something that's been torn. So you see the progression in these verses. Jesus is the one proclaiming and the one proclaimed and when he is proclaimed and received in repentance and faith there's liberty and there's comfort and then the gospel begins to produce personal change and those transformed by the gospel go out and do this work of rebuilding and repairing.

In other words, the gospel changes people who then go out and change the world. The church really is meant to be salt and light as Jesus said. So friends, this new year where will you seek to build up the ancient ruins and repair the ruined cities?

[31 : 04] How will you use the gifts and talents God has given you to do good to your neighbors? Both your Christian neighbors right here in your church family and also your non-Christian neighbors too.

One day Christ will return and make all things new. How can you be at work to anticipate that great day through love and service and justice today?

When the King comes, friends, let us not be waiting with our hands in our pockets. merely checking our email. Let us be about the mission of the King.

Christ has rescued us for a great purpose to join Him in this work of freedom and joy, proclaiming liberty to the captives, living transformed lives, seeing the ruins become rebuilt and restored.

Lord, where will you join the mission in this coming year? What good goals will you set to be about the mission of Christ? Friends, soon our King will return in glory.

[32 : 15] How will He find you waiting? May He find us joyfully and passionately engaged in His mission and may He say to us all on that day, well done, good and faithful servant.

Let's pray together. Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free.

O Lord, thank you that you've come to set us free. Father, I pray this morning for those who are here and maybe they're not sure about the claims of Christianity, but they do know what it's like to be stuck and they do know what it's like to feel like they're in captivity.

O God, I pray that by your Spirit you'd give them eyes to see the sweet freedom of the forgiveness of sins that's offered in Jesus, the offer of your Holy Spirit at work in their lives.

I pray that you would open their hearts to receive you today. And Lord, I pray for us who have already heard that message and responded in faith.

[33 : 42] O Lord, would you give us courage this year and boldness this year to be about the work of your mission. Lord, help us to see the ways in which our workplaces can be avenues of rebuilding and restoring.

Give us eyes to see areas of our hearts that need to change. Give us eyes to see the relationships you've providentially placed around us where gospel proclamation can happen. And O God, give us the confidence that you indeed are doing this work that you will accomplish the purposes that you have said for your great glory.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.