

ISAIAH: **THE GLORY OF GOD IN A WORLD OF CHAOS**

Part 13: “The Anointed One”

Isaiah 61:1-4

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Sunday, December 13, 2020 (The Third Sunday of Advent)

Scripture Reading

“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. 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” (Isaiah 61:1–4, ESV).

Introduction

Today, we will be concluding our journey through the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah is one of the longest books of the Bible, so with that mind, our study of Isaiah has not been a line-by-line, verse-by-verse analysis. Rather, this sermon series has been a *survey* of Isaiah.

The purpose of a survey is to introduce the pivotal passages and themes of a book so that, hopefully, when you come back to this it in your own times of devotion and bible-study, you will have a working knowledge of how this book is structured and what this book is about. I hope and pray that, for those of you who have followed along with this sermon series, you will take our study as an invitation to dive deeper into the richness of Isaiah, which is a book that dominates the minds of the New Testament apostles, yet is woefully undertaught in the American church.¹

By way of review, Isaiah the prophet lived in the 8th century B.C. in the southern kingdom of Judah. His ministry comes at the tail-end of the last golden age, in which the

¹ Evidence of the neglect of Isaiah is reflected in the contemporary American church’s underemphasis of key Isaianic themes like the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin, the failure of human politics to serve as an ultimate hope, the call of God’s people to justice, the eschatological expectation of redemption for and reconciliation of the nations.

kingdoms of God's people enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. [Show image **1Assyrian Empire**] That all comes to an end when the mighty empire of Assyria begins a massive conquest of the ancient Near East. It is a time of crisis. The people of God feel like their whole world is being threatened by a seemingly invincible enemy.

It is in this context that Isaiah has a vision of the Lord high and lifted up (Isa 6:1) [show image **2The Prophet Isaiah**]. And you could say that the whole purpose of Isaiah's long, sprawling prophetic book is to invite God's people into that same vision – he wants the people of God to see the glory of the Lord in a world of chaos. This central theme is why I felt the Lord leading me to teach this book to our church in this particularly chaotic season.

Even more, to conclude our study of Isaiah during the Advent season is especially appropriate. Advent is about the expectation of God's coming kingdom, and Isaiah gives us a vision of that future reality. Isaiah envisions a day of cosmic redemption when swords will be beaten into plowshares (Isa 2:4); a day when the wolf will lie down with the lamb (11:6); a day when a feast will be given on the mountain of the Lord for all people of God and death will be swallowed up (25:6-8); a day when the nations will be gathered to the City of the Lord, which radiates a magnetic light (60:3); a day when God will bring forth a completely restored new heavens and a new earth (65:17).

According to Isaiah, this time of renewal and restoration will be ushered by a new king. This king will come from the fallen house of David, but will rule the nations with righteousness (11:1). He will be the sovereign servant who will bring forth justice (42:1). He will be the suffering servant, whose wounds will bring forth healing (53:5). And as today's text will show us, he will be "**The Anointed One**" who will bring about redemption.

For the rest of our time today, we will look into our text to examine the divine mission of this Anointed One. As we do so, we will explore three big ideas in this text: **1.) The Horror of Sin, 2.) The Beauty of Redemption, and 3.) The Unexpected Messiah.**

Exposition

1.) The Horror of Sin

As I mentioned earlier, and as I have emphasized many times throughout this series, Isaiah lives at the time the Assyrian Empire aggressively conquering kingdom after kingdom in the ancient world. The threat of Assyrian invasion struck fear into the heart of everyone Isaiah knew. The Assyrian military was mighty and brutal. If you were conquered by Assyria, and lived to tell the tale, you were forcibly relocated to a different region of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria wanted to break the link between the people they conquered and their land. [Show image **3Assyrian Torture**] If you resisted Assyria, they would mercilessly torture you. In fact, it was the Assyrians who first invented and used crucifixion as a method of execution. The Assyrian threat, thus, represented death and exile.

But for Isaiah, the Assyrian problem was only scratching the surface of the real problem facing the people of God. This is why Isaiah is fixated on confronting the issue beneath the issue, the problem beneath the problem. And for Isaiah, the problem beneath all other problems is *sin*.

In fact, according to the Old Testament law, the reason that Israel and Judah were weak, the reason that their enemies grew strong, and the reason their peace was vanishing was that the people of God had been faithless to keep their covenant with God (cf. Dt 28:15-68). Despite all the warnings of the law and prophets sent by God, generation after generation of God's people fell further into idolatry, compromise, and looking more and more like the pagan nations around them. In short, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah fell into *sin*, and Isaiah wants them to know that sin is more deadly and dangerous than Assyria could ever be.

And while our text today is perhaps one of the most beautiful passages of redemption in the Bible, a mirror reading of the text shows us the devastating horror that sin unleashed on our lives. Isaiah wants us to know the brutal truth about what sin does to us so that we might rightly understand the glory of being redeemed from sin.

Look back at our passage, focusing on the condition of those the Anointed One redeems: *"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. 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"* (61:1–4).

Sin will rob you, oppress, and impoverish you. Sin will break your heart. Sin will enslave you and imprison you. Sin will burden you with a debt you could never pay. Sin will fill you with sorrow and mourning. Sin brings destruction and devastation into the lives of individual people. But it also possesses a corporate aspect that brings destruction into families, nations, and subsequent generations. Sin breeds brokenness in God's good creation.

A few years ago, my wife noticed that the cement box of our fireplace was separated from the brick of our chimney. We called a fireplace repairman to come by and fill the gaps with fresh mortar. But when he came, he studied our fireplace and our chimney. He looked on the inside and outside of our house, and he said, "Mr. Ritchie, I could put more mortar in your fireplace, but it's not going to permanently fix your problem. Your foundation on this side of your house is sinking, and if you don't fix that problem, you will start to see more separation in your fireplace, and, eventually, your chimney might fall over."

In the same way, when we turn on the news, it is all too easy to see the evidence of brokenness in our world. We see extreme poverty and hunger, injustice, and oppression. We might try to fix those issues with better education, economic theories, or policies, and those things are *important* and *necessary*. However, Scripture tells us that our deepest problem is spiritual – *our world is broken by sin*.

Sometimes we see sin in our small white lies we tell to get ahead in our profession. Sometimes sin may appear in the small indulgences of vice that we justify in our own minds or the big moral lapses that end marriages and split up families. Sometimes sin functions on a larger scale, like the CEO who outsources his labor to slaves overseas, or the corrupt government official who won't allow a shipment of food into his country suffering famine unless he is first bribed. Our world is infected by a worship of self that puts us at enmity with one another and rebellion toward God. And until this problem of sin is dealt with definitively, we are putting mortar on a falling fireplace; we are addressing the symptoms but not the disease.

The Bible tells us that, at first, sin seems as sweet as honey, but in the end, it is always as bitter as wormwood (Pr 5:3). And Isaiah wants us to know, sin is the reason we are broken. Sin is the reason our world is broken. Sin is why we yearn for a new kingdom, where all things are made new.

2.) The Beauty of Redemption

Isaiah 61 tells us the Anointed One has been empowered by the Holy Spirit of God for a mission of redemption. Biblically speaking, redemption is the act of recovery and restoration, usually by paying a ransom. Redemption entails a reversal of brokenness; a righting of all that is wrong.

Our text characterizes redemption in a myriad of beautiful ways. The Anointed One will bring *"good news to the poor"* (61:1). It is not the task of the Anointed One to offer good advice. Good advice, after all, is something that *you* do so that *you* can save yourself. Good news refers to something that has been done for you. Good news is for those who have abandoned self-salvation projects – for those that know that they are too spiritually impoverished to merit their own righteousness.

The Anointed One will also *"bind up the brokenhearted"* (61:1). If you have known the sting of betrayal, the pangs of chronic loneliness, or hopelessness, behold, this Anointed One is a healer of hearts.

He proclaims *"liberty for the captives"* (61:1); he will open the prison for all who are bound. He sets us free of the self-imposed prisons of our own making. He liberates us from spiritual bondage and oppression.

He will also “*proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*” (61:2). Now this phrase deserves some more explanation. This was a reference to a law in Leviticus 25 that established “the year of Jubilee.”²

To put it bluntly, God was not okay with cyclical, generational poverty among his people. He was not okay with his people losing their land forever or going into inescapable debt. He was not okay with wealthier people taking advantage of poorer people by charging interest or gobbling up their property when they fell on hard times. God knew that societies in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer tend to not do well in the long run. So, he established the “year of Jubilee.”

The year of Jubilee happened after seven sets of seven years. For forty-nine years, you could sell your land if you drifted into financial crisis. You could even sell yourself into debt and indentured servitude. But when the fiftieth year came, it was the year of Jubilee, when all debts would instantly go to zero. All slaves would go free. All lands would be restored to their ancestral owners.

And Isaiah is saying, “Look to the year of Jubilee, the year of the Lord’s favor! Look at this example of extravagant and scandalous grace and forgiveness! *That* is what the Anointed One will do for your sin. Your cosmic debt will be paid in full!”

Nevertheless, the Anointed One will also proclaim “*the day of vengeance of our God*” (61:2). This is a reference to the “Day of the Lord.” It is the day when God will cast wrathful judgment upon all evil. For the ancient Israelites, the “Day of the Lord” was a sobering and terrifying reality. But it was also a day to be *longed* for by the people of God. It is the day when God will bring an eternal end to the powers of darkness. God will put the world to rights. No injustice will be allowed to slide or remain hidden.

This means that we truly can forgive even our unrepentant enemies for the evil they have done to us. Because Anointed One has guaranteed to usher in the “Day of the Lord,” we no longer need to bear the impossible burden of creating our own justice. We can cast that weight upon the shoulder of a Judge who is mighty, not only to bring forth our justice but perfect justice for all creation.

The Anointed One will give the “*oil of gladness instead of mourning*” (61:3) and a garment of praise to those of a faint spirit. The imagery here entails the preparation of a joyous feast for those who have been afflicted by grief and sorrow. Isaiah is saying depression does not get the final word for God’s people; neither does death. All sad things will become untrue.

Through the work of the Anointed One, God’s people will be established as “*oaks of righteousness*” (61:3). In Isaiah 1, God’s people were compared to dying oaks that wither and burn due to their idolatry (1:29-31). But here in Isaiah 61, God’s people are

² Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 409–410.

redeemed. Like the blessed man of Psalm 1, they shall be like trees planted by streams of water who bear their fruit in their season, and their leaves will not wither (Ps 1:1-3).³

Even more, God's people will become restorers of creation. 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"* (Isa 61:4).

Through the redemptive work of the Anointed One, God's people will be so thoroughly transformed that they will be instruments through which God's restorative power flows. They will be ambassadors of New Creation.⁴

3.) The Unexpected Messiah

As the Jewish people were conquered and went into exile, and especially as the time between the Old and New Testament extended into centuries of prophetic silence, the hope of the Anointed One began to captivate the imaginations of the people of God. They longed for the Anointed One to come at long last and bring the redemption only he can bring.

There even came to be used a specialized term that described this expectation. In Isaiah 61:1, the verb "anointed" is the word *"mashach"* (מָשַׁח). When you turn this word into a noun, such as "Anointed One," it becomes *"meshiach"* (מְשִׁיחַ) – the very word from which we get the English word "messiah."

By the time of Jesus's lifetime, the Jewish people had a pretty clear expectation of who they wanted the messiah to be. They wanted a deliverer like Moses, a warrior like Joshua, and a king like David. They wanted a political-military leader who could defeat the power of Rome and re-establish the glory of the Jewish nation.

It was in this context that a Jewish rabbi of humble origins, the son of a carpenter, stood before his hometown synagogue. Luke tells us the story: *"And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor'"* (Lk 4:17–19).

Already his fame had spread as a powerful teacher of God's word and even a worker of miracles. The room would have been pregnant with expectation as to how Jesus would unfold the mysteries of the messiah. But instead, Luke tells us, *"And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has*

³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 567.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. (New York, HarperCollins, 2006), xi.

been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Lk 4:20–21). Essentially, [show image 4Jesus Teaching at Nazareth] Jesus opens up Isaiah 61, reads it, sits down, and says, “This is about me!”

The people of Nazareth are scandalized and offended. But the gospel writers show us that Jesus is true his to word to fulfill Isaiah 61.

Jesus will go on to proclaim good news to the poor, by declaring, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!” (Mt 5:3).

He will heal the brokenhearted, when he stops in the middle of a crowd to heal the woman with the issue of blood (Mk 5:25-34).

He will proclaim liberty to the captives when he sets people free who have been oppressed by demonic spirits (Mk 5:1-20).

He will show the extravagant grace of the year of the Lord’s favor when he announces, not just healing, but the forgiveness of sin (Lk 5:17-26).

Through commanding the power of life over death, he will give the oil of gladness to Martha and Mary, as they mourn the death of their brother Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44).

As the resurrected one, he is the author of the kingdom that is to come (1 Cor 15:12-58). As the Son of Man, he is the judge who stands at the end of history to right all wrongs (Lk 22:66-71).

No matter what your pain is, he sees you! No matter your brokenness, he is capable of redeeming and restoring you! Jesus is the Anointed One! He is the Messiah!

Conclusion

I chose Isaiah 61 as the passage to conclude our survey of Isaiah because it is the one place where Jesus himself says, “This is all about me.”

But, if you take the time to become familiar with Isaiah and read the New Testament carefully, you will find that *all* of Isaiah is about Jesus. He is Immanuel (Isa 7:14). He is the sprout that springs from the stump of Jesse and the heir of David (11:1). He is the Sovereign Servant and the Suffering Servant (42:1-4; 52:13-53:12). He is Spirit-anointed Messiah (Isa 61:1-4)! For this reason, Isaiah has been called by some “*The Fifth Gospel*.”⁵

As we, like Isaiah, navigate a time of great fear and uncertainty, may we seek to have eyes that see the Lord sitting upon his throne, high and lifted up. May we have ears that are more attuned to the gospel than we are the voices of social media, political pundits, podcasts, and YouTube videos. May we truly tremble before the word of the Lord (66:2).

⁵ See John F.A. Sawyer. *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Thankfully, Advent is designed precisely to meet that end. Advent is a time to re-focus our hearts on the kingdom that is coming, a time to allow the Holy Spirit to enlarge our vision of God so that we see his glory in our age of chaos.

AMEN.

Discussion starters for Gospel Community

- 1. Read Isaiah 61:1-4 and summarize it in your own words.*
- 2. As you re-read this passage, what can you deduce are the negative effects of sin on us and creation.*
- 3. As you look at aspects of the redeeming activity of the "Anointed One" in this passage, which verse (or even phrase) is the most meaningful to you?*
- 4. Read Luke 4:16-21. What is Jesus saying about himself in this passage? How do the gospels show that Jesus completed the mission of Isa 61:1-4?*
- 5. The season of Advent is meant to stir us to a hopeful expectation of the kingdom of God that is to come. How should Isa 61:1-4 form our hope this Advent season?*