

ADVENT 2023

Part 3: “The Anointed King”

Isaiah 61:1–4

By David A. Ritchie

Sunday, December 17, 2023 (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).

The Collect

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent you messenger to prepare your way before you; Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight, who lives and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen*¹

Introduction

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, and today’s Old Testament reading comes from Isaiah 61.

The season of Advent is about the expectation of God’s coming kingdom. And Isaiah is an Old Testament prophet who gives us one of the most vivid visions of that future reality in all of Scripture.

In chapter 2, Isaiah envisions a day when all war will cease and all swords will be beaten into plowshares (2:4). It is a day of perfect almost unimaginable peace and shalom, as he describes in chapter 11, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb (11:6). In chapter 25, he foretells a day when the people of God will feast together on the mountain of the

¹ *The Book of Common*, 93.

Lord and death will be swallowed up forever (25:6-8). In chapter 60, he tells of a day when the redeemed of the nations will be gathered into the City of the Lord, which radiates a magnetic light (60:3). And in chapter 65, he speaks of a day when God will bring forth a completely restored new heavens and a new earth (65:17).

But according to Isaiah, this time of cosmic renewal will not come by itself. No, the restoration of all things will be ushered in by a king, a long-promised, long-awaited king, an *anointed* king. And, here, in Isaiah chapter 61, we have one of the most detailed descriptions in all of Old Testament scripture of all this Anointed King will come to accomplish.

So, for the rest of our time today, we will look into our text to examine the divine mission of God's Anointed King. 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 in last week's sermon, the prophet Isaiah lived during a time when the Assyrian Empire was aggressively conquering kingdom after kingdom in the ancient world. The threat of the Assyrian invasion struck fear into the heart of everyone Isaiah knew because the Assyrians were brutal.

If you resisted Assyria, they would mercilessly torture you. If you surrendered to Assyria, they would forcibly remove you from your homeland and enslave you. 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, throughout his book, is fixated on confronting the issue beneath the issues; the problem beneath the problems. 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. Deut 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 injustice. Instead of imaging the God who saved and redeemed them, they began 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, if we look closely, this text also shows us the devastating horror that sin

unleashed on our lives. Isaiah wants us to know the horrific 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, and pay attention on the condition of those the Anointed King 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”* (Isa 61:1–4).

Isaiah is saying, this is the truth about sin! At first sin might try to play nice and pretend to please you.

But in the end sin will rob you, oppress you, 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 at 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 the small white lies we tell to make a profit or 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 labor to slaves overseas or the corrupt government official who demands to be paid a bribe in order to allow a shipment of food into his famine-ridden.

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.

If you were to be honest with yourself, think for a moment on the ways you have seen sin bring brokenness, pain, and devastation in your life or the lives of those you love.

The Bible tells us that, at first, sin seems as sweet as honey, but in the end, it is always as bitter as wormwood (Prov 5:3). And Isaiah wants us to know that sin is a vicious tyrant. And it is because of the horror of sin that we must yearn for a new kingdom where all things are made new.

2.) The Beauty of Redemption

Isaiah 61 tells us the Anointed King 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 describes redemption in a myriad of beautiful ways, and I'd like to take some time to unpack them one by one.

First, the Anointed King will bring **"good news to the poor"** (61:1). God's good news isn't just for the powerful, the popular, and the impressive. In fact, the Anointed King is the champion of the poor and the vulnerable. His salvation is for those who know they cannot save themselves. His strength is perfected in our weakness.

The Anointed King will also **"bind up the brokenhearted"** (61:1). So, if you have known the sting of betrayal; if you have felt the pangs of chronic loneliness or hopelessness, behold, this Anointed King is a healer of hearts! And he can bind up your broken heart as well.

He proclaims **"liberty for the captives"** (61:1). The king will open the prison for all who are bound. So, if you have ever felt trapped by or enslaved to destructive patterns of thinking and behavior, look to the liberty God's Anointed King will bring. He sets us free of our "mind-forg'd manacles" and the self-imposed prisons of our own making. He liberates us from spiritual bondage and oppression of the power of sin.

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 ordinance in the old Law of Moses in known as "the year of Jubilee." You can read more about this law in Leviticus 25:8-55. In essence, the year of Jubilee was a year when God commanded all debts to be forgiven.

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

The year of Jubilee was (most often) a once in a lifetime financial reset that 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 to be a 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.

Needless to say, this was a radical law in ancient society. No other nations had a custom like it. But then again, no other nation had a God like Israel's God.

And Isaiah is saying, "Look to the year of Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favor! Look at this example of extravagant, scandalous grace and forgiveness! *That* is what the Anointed King will do for your sin for all of time. Your debt will be paid in full!"

But the Anointed King will not only bring grace—he will also bring justice. Isaiah says he will proclaim "*the day of vengeance of our God*" (61:2). Here is yet another Old Testament concept that deserves to be unpacked. Isaiah's day of vengeance is what other he and other prophets refer to elsewhere as to as the "Day of the Lord" (24:21–22; 13:9–11). It is the day when God will pour out his righteous wrath upon all evil.

For the ancient Israelites, the "Day of the Lord" was a sobering and terrifying reality, wherein all people would stand in judgment before a Holy God. But the Day of the Lord 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. All enemies will be vanquished. And all the ways sin and evil has wounded and abused people will be healed and made right.

And, if you let it, the truth of God's coming justice can actually liberate you from the tyranny of holding on to bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart. If you believe in the promise of God's justice, you can forgive even your worst enemies.

Because the Anointed King 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 to bring forth our justice and justice in all of creation.

Moving on, 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 that because of the work of the Anointed King, depression does not get the final word for

God's people; neither does grief; and neither does death. There is a day coming when all sad things will become untrue.

Through the work of the Anointed King, God's people will be established as "**oaks of righteousness**" (61:3). This is an interesting metaphor for the prophet Isaiah. Back in Isaiah chapter 1, God's people were compared to dying oaks that would wither and burn due to their idolatry (1:29–31).

But here in Isaiah 61, God's people are 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).²

Even more, God's people will become restorers of creation. Look again at verse 4: Isaiah says, "**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.

This is why the people of God have historically built hospitals to care for and heal the sick. It's why the church has built orphanages and cared for the poor throughout the centuries. It's why Christians in our own city have founded and funded multiple non-profit organizations to serve single-mothers and at-risk youth and refugees from war-torn nations.

We have been invited be a part of God's redemptive work in the earth. We are co-laborers in the mission of God. We are ambassadors of God's coming kingdom.

3.) The Unexpected Messiah

Years after the ministry of Isaiah, the Jewish were eventually conquered and sent into exile. Yet, even when they were able to come home and rebuild Jerusalem they never lost hope that one day God would send the Anointed King that Isaiah had prophesied about. Especially as the time between the Old and New Testament extended into centuries of prophetic silence, the hope of the promised liberator king 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.

A specialized term that described this expectation even came to be used. 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). It is the very word from which we get the English word "messiah."

² 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.

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, who could lead them to freedom. They wanted a warrior like Joshua, who could vanquish all their enemies and give take back their land. They wanted a king like David, who could rule and reign and make Israel into a great kingdom again. They wanted a leader who could defeat the power of Rome and re-establish the glory of the Jewish nation. But when they envisioned salvation, the world had conditioned them to think almost exclusively in military and political outcomes. Far too often, our own culture forms us to think in those same terms.

Yet, it was in this context of expectations that a Jewish rabbi of humble origins—the son of a carpenter—would stand before his hometown synagogue and challenge all preconceived notions of who the Messiah would be.

For in Nazareth, Jesus would read these very words from Isaiah. The gospel of 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’”* (Luke 4:17–19).

You see, already Jesus's fame had spread as a powerful teacher of God's word and even a worker of miracles. As Jesus read these words, the room would have been pregnant with expectation as to how Jesus would unfold and explain the mysteries of the Messiah.

But instead, he says something no one was expecting him to say. 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 been fulfilled in your hearing’”* (Luke 4:20–21). Essentially, [show image [Jesus Teaching at Nazareth](#)] Jesus opens up Isaiah 61, reads it, sits down, and says, *“This is all about me!”*

At once, the people of Nazareth are immediately scandalized and offended. How dare someone that they have known from childhood claim to be filled with God's very Spirit? How dare he claim to be their rightful king? They are so outraged that they even want to put him to death for such brazen words of blasphemy.

But Jesus will not be put to death in Nazareth, for Jesus's time to die has not yet come. However, the gospel writers show us that Jesus is true to his word to fulfill the mission of 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!" (Matt 5:3). He will provide bread for the poor who follow him, all the while he will teach them that he is the true bread of life. And he continues to call all who are weak and heavy laden to himself today.

He will heal the brokenhearted when he stops in the middle of a crowded street to heal an unclean woman with a chronic medical affliction (Mark 5:25–34). So too, he sees you in the midst of a crowds. And he can heal your broken heart if you reach to him in faith.

He will proclaim liberty to the captives when he sets people free who have been oppressed by demonic spirits (Mark 5:1-20). And, today, his truth is still able to set you free.

Jesus will show the extravagant grace of the year of jubilee and the Lord's favor when he announces the forgiveness of sin to those whom he heals (Luke 5:17–26). For by his perfect righteousness and substitutionary death, all our sins have been forgiven and all our debts have been paid.

By resurrecting the dead, he will give the oil of gladness to those mourn (John 11:1–44). And as the resurrected one, he is the one who will bring all death and devastation to an end (1 Cor 15:12–58).

He will one day return to be our judge and the one who will bring forth our justice. For is the One who will bring forth God's kingdom. However, brings that kingdom in an unexpected way. For his kingdom will not come through conquest but through a cross.

What Isaiah 61 shows us, what the gospels show us, is that no matter what your pain is, God has seen you! No matter your brokenness, he is capable of redeeming and restoring you. No matter your sin, he is able to forgive you! No matter your sorrow, he can give you joy! And no matter how hopeless this world may seem he can give us hope.

For Jesus is the Anointed King! He is the Messiah! And his kingdom is coming!

So, Redeemer Christian Church, as we enter into these final days of Advent, may our hearts hear and receive the words of the prophet. May our hearts be filled with hope in the promises of God. May our eyes behold, the wondrous mystery of the Anointed Messiah—the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 King” 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?*
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?*