

When God Comes Down

God's Worldwide Mission

Isaiah 61:1-11

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God's Worldwide Mission¹

Scripture

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent.

Our Scripture reading in this Advent season brings us to Isaiah 61:1-11. In this text we read about God's worldwide mission. This text teaches us what God's Anointed One will do when God comes down. And it also teaches us what we will do when God comes down. Isaiah wants to inspire in us such admiration for God's Anointed One that we gladly give ourselves to his cause.

Let us read Isaiah 61:1-11:

¹The 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;
²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to 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.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
⁵Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks;

¹ The material for this sermon is drawn from Ortlund, R. C., Jr. & Hughes, R. K., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

foreigners shall be your plowmen
and vinedressers;
⁶but you shall be called the priests of the Lord;
they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God;
you shall eat the wealth of the nations,
and in their glory you shall boast.
⁷Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion;
instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot;
therefore in their land they shall
possess a double portion;
they shall have everlasting joy.

⁸For I the Lord love justice;
I hate robbery and wrong;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹Their offspring shall be known among the nations,
and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge them,
that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
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.
¹¹For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it
to sprout up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to sprout up before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:1-11)

Introduction

The essence of Christianity is joy. God's message to the world was summarized by the angel at the birth of Jesus: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all

the people” (Luke 2:10).

That’s significant, because, life is tough. When I was young I found happiness in sports. But, of course, that didn’t last. To get more happiness, I had to find new ways to make myself happy. I turned to alcohol. Others turned to drugs, or sex, or whatever.

But it wasn’t until I turned to God that I found true happiness and peace and fulfillment—and joy. I found what the angel announced 2,000 years earlier—“good news of great joy.”

My life was completely transformed by the good news of great joy. I was never the same person again.

In this world, that’s huge. When real people living real lives in this world demonstrate real joy, it’s living proof that God saves sinners. Pastor and commentator Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains the powerful impact of joyful Christians:

As we face the modern world with all its trouble and turmoil and with all its difficulties and sadness, nothing is more important than that we who call ourselves Christian, and who claim the Name of Christ, should be representing our faith in such a way before others as to give them the impression that here is the solution, and here is the answer. In a world where everything has gone so sadly astray, we should be standing out as men and women apart, people characterized by a fundamental joy and certainty in spite of conditions, in spite of adversity.²

One of the marks of the early Christians was their joy in God as they lived in a hard world.

According to one archaeologist, the apartment buildings of ancient Rome were so shoddily built that “the city was constantly filled with the noise of buildings collapsing or being torn down to prevent it; and the tenants of an [apartment] lived in constant expectation of its coming down on their heads.”³

That was the setting in which the Roman Christians raised

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 23.

³ Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 31-32.

their families. The classical world was not all gleaming marble and flowing white togas and sumptuous banquets. It was messy. The streets of Rome were deepest darkness after nightfall. There was no medical care as we know it, no inoculations for children, no retirement benefits, no air-conditioning, and no refrigeration.

But the early Christians, living in that world, stood out because God gave them a gift from beyond that world. Overflowing acceptance through the cross, God's presence in their hearts, practical wisdom for daily life, and endless enjoyment of him in heaven—isn't that enough to make anyone happy? They thought so.

But just telling people to be happy won't work. That's annoying. But the gospel doesn't do that. It gives us a hope *beyond* everything that beats us down. The Apostle Peter called it "joy. . . inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

That is Christ's gift to the world today. His mission is to bring good news to the poor and to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim liberty to the captives and to comfort all who mourn and anoint them with gladness, so that God may be glorified. And he has made us partners with him in that mission.

Lesson

Isaiah 61:1-11 teaches us that God's worldwide mission is:

1. To preach good news (61:1-3),
2. To replace shame with honor (61:4-7),
3. To make an everlasting covenant (61:8-9), and
4. To bring great joy (61:10-11)

I. **God's Worldwide Mission Is to Preach Good News (61:1-3)**

First, God's worldwide mission is to preach good news.

Isaiah 61:1-3 says, "**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.”

These three verses are all one long sentence, because Jesus was given the greatest anointing of the Spirit in the history of the human race for one reason: to bring good news to the poor.

Jesus himself defined his mission this way: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

Here in Isaiah 61:1-3 our Messiah announces with seven infinitives (by use of “to”) all that it means for him to save us.

Jesus came with a message different from what our emotions tell us. Our emotions tell us that God is against us, we've exhausted our possibilities, life is a waste, so why not just settle into mediocrity and make the best of it? We live in an age of despair. But it's a smiling despair, softened by consumer convenience, driving through for a “happy meal” along the way.

Into our age Jesus says, “I came to bear your guilty despair far away, and to replace it with joy inexpressible and filled with glory.”

How does he do it? By *preaching*: **“The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. . . to proclaim liberty to the captives.”** The *NIV* translates this, “to *preach* good news.”

What is the good news? The gospel announces that Christ has won the victory over everything that's against us. If you've committed what you think is the unpardonable sin, if you're broken by your failures, if you fear that your chance at life is over—Jesus announces to you a life so new that, if you understand what he's saying, you'll have difficulty believing it can be yours.

Back in the Old Testament, God was already hinting at this.

He established an institution called the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8–55). Every fiftieth year Israel was to take the whole year off, cancel all debts, return to its original owners all family property that had been sold, and generally be kind and generous to everyone. “Proclaim liberty throughout the land” (Leviticus 25:10)—that was everyone’s job for a whole year. It foreshadowed the liberation of Christ (Galatians 5:1).

Isaiah is saying that the Messiah brings that liberation to its fullest realization through the gospel. The cross cancels all our debts. God says we’re free to leave the past behind and move on with joyful relief. That is the mission of Jesus in your life. Will you welcome him?

Jesus identified with this passage so closely that he launched his ministry by reading it in a synagogue service in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21). After he read these verses, he looked around and said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” History in the making! All the tangles of sin complicating our lives since the fall of Adam, Jesus at that moment began to loosen.

And he continues to free people today through the preaching of the gospel. Every Christian preacher today should be able to say, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me.” And when that is so, then Isaiah 61 is being fulfilled in *your* hearing.

But there’s a problem in this passage, or at least a question. Why does Messiah say, “**to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God**” (61:2)? The year of the Lord’s favor is the Jubilee of gospel freedom. We’re living in that era now. The Bible says, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2b).

But what is “**the day of vengeance of our God**”? When Jesus read this passage at that service in Nazareth, he didn’t read these words. He stopped reading at the end of the first line of verse 2. He omitted any reference to the day of the vengeance of our God. Why? Doesn’t he fulfill all three verses?

Christ fulfills all the prophecies, but not all at the same time. At his first coming, he inaugurated the year of the Lord’s favor. At

his second coming, he'll bring in the day of the vengeance of our God, when the door of grace will shut forever. There is a gap in time between the first line of verse 2 and the second line of verse 2, and we're living right now in that interval.

It's as if Isaiah looks into the future and sees two mountain peaks far away, one beyond the other. But he can't see how much distance there is between them. So we don't know how long we have. But as long as this season of favor lasts, the Messiah continues to use the preaching of the gospel to take away the ashes of mourning that our dark thoughts heap on our heads and to pour upon us the oil of gladness.

What is the net impact? Does his spreading joy have a morally weakening influence? Verse 3 says, “. . . **that they may be called oaks of righteousness.**” The gospel builds strong Christians—**“the planting of the Lord.”** And his ultimate purpose in it all is **“that the Lord may be glorified.”**

So, God's worldwide mission is to preach good news. And he wants us to receive it and to join him in proclaiming it to others.

II. God's Worldwide Mission Is to Replace Shame with Honor (61:4-7)

Second, God's worldwide mission is to replace shame with honor.

Isaiah 61:4-7 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. Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; but you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.”**

Long-standing ruins in our lives, in our homes, in our world—God promises to give back everything sin has ruined. And he does it through us. The mourners of verse 3 become the repair experts of verse 4. Isaiah uses the language of rebuilding because the Jewish people literally rebuilt the ruins of Jerusalem after the exile. But that was only a token of a deeper restoration for us all.

We need this. We have **“the devastations of many generations”** in our lives and in our homes. That’s what sin does. Sin creates victims, who feel entitled to retaliate, which creates more sin and more victims who feel entitled to retaliate, which creates more sin and more victims. . . .

Bob Dylan sings:

*Broken bottles, broken plates,
broken switches, broken gates,
Broken dishes, broken parts,
streets are filled with broken hearts.
Broken words never meant to be spoken,
everything is broken.*⁴

Ever since Adam fell, sin has been spreading a culture of death. We’ll never understand ourselves and our surroundings without that background. This world is not normal. We are not normal. Everything is broken.

So here’s a radical proposal: *We need a Savior*. And the only person in the history of the human race who qualifies is Jesus.

He came to re-create us. And Isaiah’s point in verse 4 is that gospel-liberated people themselves become a creative force for restoration. That’s *our* mission. God says, in verses 5, 6, that this mission is heroic and will be perceived as heroic and, in verse 7, that this mission is joyful with a joy that will last forever.

The mission of Jesus and his church will be rebuilding ruins when every noble human salvation is falling into ruins. Why can we be confident of that?

⁴ Bob Dylan, “Everything is Broken” (1989).

III. God's Worldwide Mission Is to Make an Everlasting Covenant (61:8-9)

Third, God's worldwide mission is to make an everlasting covenant.

Isaiah 61:8-9 says, **“For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.”**

God commits himself to us. Remember that the word **“justice”** means more than legal rectitude; it means the way human life and human society are supposed to be.

God *loves* patterns of human wholeness. He loves to see his kingdom coming and his will being done on earth as it is done in heaven.

And he *hates* the **“robbery and wrong”** of the world as it is today, distorting what he meant us to be. This is who God is: He loves what is right and he hates what is wrong with all the intensity of the divine being.

It's unthinkable that God would fail to keep his covenant.

Invest yourself in the new world God is building. You can risk it. You can seek first his kingdom and righteousness above your own kingdom, because he isn't just recruiting you; he's promising to bless you.

IV. God's Worldwide Mission Is to Bring Great Joy (61:10-11)

And fourth, God's worldwide mission is to bring great joy.

Isaiah 61:10-11 says, **“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; 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. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.”

Messiah is speaking here. He is delighting in God's strategy for world renewal. It's true that Jesus was "a man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3). But not anymore. Now he's greatly rejoicing. God has clothed him with the garments of salvation and covered him with the robe of righteousness. What does that mean? Back in Isaiah 59:17 God clothed himself with righteousness and salvation. In other words, God asserted himself and displayed himself on behalf of righteousness and salvation in this world. But here we find that he exerts that resolve through the Messiah. In other words, God saves us *through Christ*.

Isaiah sees our Messiah *enjoying* saving us. His influence has all the joy of a wedding celebration, all the fruitfulness of a garden sprouting with new life. He's been doing this for 2,000 years, and he's only begun. Through Jesus, God launched into this sad world an outpouring of joy that will leave the nations in awe. And on this very day in history, at this moment, Jesus is on the move, doing God's saving will all over the world with joyful enthusiasm. Isn't that a cause big enough and bright enough to compel our allegiance?

Conclusion

Advent is a great time of the year to reflect on the time when God comes down. Let us give thanks for God's worldwide mission, which is to preach good news (61:1-3), to replace shame with honor (61:4-7), to make an everlasting covenant (61:8-9), and to bring great joy (61:10-11). Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
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PRAAYER:

O God, we give you thanks for your worldwide mission, which is to preach good news (61:1-3), to replace shame with honor (61:4-7), to make an everlasting covenant (61:8-9), and to bring great joy (61:10-11).

And for all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.