

Ambassadors of the Holy City

Isaiah 61-62

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Ames, Iowa

Jan. 29, 2023

Last Sunday, we learned that we are the Holy City of God, and yet we are traveling to the Holy City of God. I'm not confusing my metaphors when I say this. It is true. We are God's Holy City built on the Foundation of the shed blood of Christ, and yet we are traveling to the perfect Holy City of God which is our destination. Amazing right?

The late Christian philosopher and apologist Chuck Colson wrote a book called *How Now Shall We Live*. In it, he pondered the question of who God says we are and how we should live in our culture. When we understand that God says that we are the Bride of Christ, holy and perfect, the question is: *How should we live in light of this truth?*

In light of Isaiah 60, the question we need to answer is: *What kind of people and what kind of local church ought we be as we travel to the Holy City of God?*

Isaiah 61-62 helps us answer this question. In these two chapters, the Suffering Servant and Isaiah exhort us on how we should live as we travel together to the House of Zion. *Isaiah tells us five things we ought to practice as we travel to our heavenly home.*

I. A Life of Proclamation (Isaiah 61:1-9)

Listen to vv. 1-3 one more time, and as I read it, I want you to listen/look for the seven infinitives in the text. These three verses (one long sentence) tell us what the Lord Jesus Christ came to do. They are really Jesus' mission statement for His earthly ministry.

*The Spirit of the Lord God is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and freedom to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of our God's vengeance;
to comfort all who mourn,
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion;
to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
festive oil instead of mourning,
and splendid clothes instead of despair.
And they will be called righteous trees,
planted by the Lord to glorify him.*

Jesus came and still comes to people who are hurting, broken, and helpless. He comes to people who are in bondage to sin. Jesus is the True King and True Prophet who received the ultimate anointing from God to preach in order to save His people. So, when Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-3 in Luke 4:18-19, He was letting everyone know He was beginning His ministry.

The background of Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18-19 is Leviticus 25. In Leviticus 25, we are told about the *Year of Jubilee*. Here is how the *Year of Jubilee* worked. Every seven years, the Jews were supposed to observe a *sabbatical year*. During the *sabbatical year*, the land was supposed to rest.

Then after seven sabbatical years, or forty-nine years, they were to celebrate the fiftieth year as the *Year of Jubilee*. During that year, all debts were supposed to be canceled, all land was returned to the original owners, and the slaves were freed. Essentially, everybody was given a fresh new beginning. The problem was they never were obedient to the Lord, so they never practiced the *Year of Jubilee*.

So, when Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-3, He was proclaiming that the *Year of Jubilee* had finally arrived in Him. But Jesus inaugurated the *Year of Jubilee* in a far better way than they anticipated.

In Christ, the *Year of Jubilee* is fulfilled. If you have trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are living today in the *True Year of Jubilee*.

What the *Year of Jubilee* means in Christ is that He has released you from the bondage of your sin. He set you free when He paid your spiritual debt of your sin. When He died in your place on the cross for your sins, you were freed from the bondage of your sin.¹

In v. 3, we see Jesus' stunning work of substitution. When we trust Jesus as our Savior, He takes the ashes of our lives and gives us His crown of beauty. He takes the grief and mourning of our lives and gives us His joy.

Finally, He takes our garments of despair and clothes us in the brilliance of His glory. In v. 3, Jesus is saying to us, *"I'll give you what I have [and] You give me what you have."*²

Finally, v. 3 concludes by saying that we have been given Jesus' righteousness. In the New Testament, we understand this to be the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Imputation means Jesus put the righteousness He earned by living a perfect, sinless life into us.

At the end of v. 3, Jesus calls His people *righteous trees*. So, like sap that runs in the heart of a tree, the sap of Jesus' righteousness has been put in us so that we bloom with His glory. These three verses describe what Jesus does for all who come to Him in faith and trust Him as their Lord and Savior.

Now that Jesus has put His life in us, vv. 4-9 tell us we have been given His ministry. In other words, if vv. 1-3 are Jesus' mission, then vv. 4-9 is our mission statement as a church. Like our Savior, we are sent into a world devastated by sin and Satan.

We are sent to proclaim the good news to those broken by sin and imprisoned by their guilt. We are sent to tell them Jesus will set them free if they will trust Him. We are sent to tell them that He will do for them what He has done for us. We are sent to tell them that Jesus is able to rebuild the ruins of their lives. We are sent to tell them that He is able to restore what has been devastated by sin.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, sin may leave a trail of wreckage, but Jesus is the Ultimate Rebuilder of lives that have been laid waste by sin. Listen to how Revelation 1:5b-6 echoes the ministry given to us in Isaiah 60:6:

To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by his blood,⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Then in vv. 5-7, we learn that our mission is a heroic mission. Forget *Spiderman*, *the Avengers*, and all those made-up dudes; God says our mission is heroic, and those who go on this rescue mission will be honored as God's kingdom of priests. Finally, those who are part of this rescue mission and those who are rescued are filled with eternal joy.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 156.

² Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

However, before we move deeper into the last part of Isaiah 61, we must come back to the end of v. 3. To our great sadness, not everyone will love the gospel. When Jesus read Isaiah 61:2, He didn't read this phrase, "*and the day of our God's vengeance.*" When you read Luke 4:12, you will notice He omitted that phrase.

The reason He did not read it is that that day, *the day of vengeance*, is not here yet. It is still to come. Jesus fulfills all of verses 1-3, but He does not fulfill them all at the same time.

Jesus' first coming inaugurated the *Year of the Lord's Favor*. However, when He returns, He will bring the *Day of Vengeance* for those who have rejected the good news of the gospel.

Right now, we live in the *Year of the Lord's Favor*. But we are moving toward the day of Christ's return. When He returns, the door of grace will be closed and locked forever.³

Right now, we plead with those who have not trusted in Jesus to believe the gospel. Confess your sin, ignorance, and rejection of Christ and turn to Him. Repent of your sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not wait! Today is the *favorable day*; today is the day of salvation for anyone who will trust Jesus.

II. A Life of Praise (Isaiah 61:10-11)

In vv. 10-11, we find the second charge for God's people. In light of the work of the Suffering Servant ushering in the *Year of Jubilee*, we are to live lives of praise.

In v. 10, Jesus praises God for clothing Him in righteousness and salvation. He is the handsome bridegroom dressed for His bride, the church. We are getting a glimpse of the *Marriage of Christ to His Bride* at the end of time. He is beautifully dressed in His righteousness and ready to wrap His arms around His people.

Then, v. 11 says that as the whole earth witnesses the coming of the King, the people of God worship their King. They will witness the *Marriage of Jesus to His Bride*, and they will rejoice.

For us, this is one of those "*already and not yet*" texts. We worship now because of what we see our Savior will do. We look forward to the consummation of Christ's Kingdom, where the whole world will worship Jesus in Spirit and in truth. Yet, until that day comes, we worship here and now, knowing that our Savior is coming soon.

III. A Life of Passionate Renewal for Christ's Church (Isaiah 62:1-5)

In Isaiah 62:1-5, Isaiah looks at God's people, the church; there is still much work to be done. They are not yet righteous. His heart is broken for the condition of God's people, so He proclaims that he is consumed with a passion for seeing the church renewed and restored, and prepared for the Bridegroom. The language in these verses is poetic, and it is figurative, so do not let the imagery of marriage throw you off. Look in vv. 1-5:

*I will not keep silent because of Zion [the church],
and I will not keep still because of Jerusalem,
until her righteousness shines like a bright light
and her salvation, like a flaming torch.*

² *Nations will see your righteousness
and all kings, your glory.*

*You will be given a new name
that the Lord's mouth will announce.*

³ *You will be a glorious crown in the Lord's hand,
and a royal diadem in the palm of your God's hand.*

⁴ *You will no longer be called Deserted,
and your land will not be called Desolate;
instead, you will be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you,
and your land will be married.*

³ Ray Ortlund, Jr., *Preaching the Word Series: Isaiah*, 410.

*⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman,
so your sons will marry you;
and as a groom rejoices over his bride,
so your God will rejoice over you.*

In these five verses, we hear Isaiah's passion for God's people. He longs to see God's people be the full display of God's glory in how they live and worship God. What we know is that Isaiah was looking at the church. He longed for the church to be a brilliant display of God's glory.

What is your passion right now? Are you passionate about the church, or is coming to a worship service just something you check off the list Sundays? Do you desire to see God's church built up and serving one another and faithfully proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to a lost world? Would you say you are plugged into your church or disconnected?

What about sharing the gospel with those who are lost? Do you care about people who are dying and going to hell? Do you care that they need to hear the gospel? I ask these questions because Jesus cares for His church, and He cares about those who are lost and need to hear the gospel. If we are on mission with Jesus, then His mission will be our mission.

You see, God is passionate about His church and vv. 1-5 helps us do a heart check to see if we love the local church and the lost. So, when we read a text like this, we must ask ourselves if we love the body of Christ the same way He does.

Let's drill down deeper with some personal applications. How do you talk about Grand Avenue? How do you treat people at GABC? Where do you serve on a regular basis at GABC? Do you rejoice in GABC as Jesus does his bride?

Jesus loves us here at GABC, and our calling is to love Christ's church the same way He did. Our lives won't purchase salvation like Jesus' life did, but we are called to lay down our lives for one another. This is our calling to one another in a local church. Bottom line: The power of the gospel creates people who love Christ's church and lay down their lives for their friends in Christ's church.

IV. A Life of Intercession for the Church (Isaiah 62:6-9)

In Isaiah 6-9, Isaiah calls us to continually intercede for our church:

*Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen on your walls;
they will never be silent, day or night.*

There is no rest for you, who remind the Lord.

*⁷ Do not give him rest
until he establishes and makes Jerusalem
the praise of the earth.*

*⁸ The Lord has sworn with his right hand
and his strong arm: I will no longer give your grain
to your enemies for food,
and foreigners will not drink the new wine
for which you have labored.*

*⁹ For those who gather grain will eat it
and praise the Lord,
and those who harvest the grapes will drink the wine
in my holy courts.*

Brothers and sisters, we are the watchmen on the walls. God has placed us at GABC to continually cry out to God to make it holy, righteous, and fruitful.

We are called to be like the woman in Jesus' parable who pestered the unrighteous judge until he did what she requested. Jesus concluded this parable by teaching us that if an unrighteous judge will do that, then how much more will God answer the persistent prayers of His people?

We should boldly and humbly go before the throne of grace and make our requests to God. We must remember that our prayers go up before our God like a sweet-smelling aroma because Jesus has purchased our prayers with His blood.

May the Lord make us a people who continually go to the Lord in prayer on behalf of the saints. Let's pray for the members of our body. Use the church directory as a prayer list. You may not know what to pray for someone; you may not even know them that well, but lift them up to God. Figure out a way to pray through the directory that works best for you.

Also, let's pray for the lost people we know. We should all know someone who needs Jesus, and we need to pray that they get saved. If you don't know any, then pray that God would put lost people in your life so you can pray for them and tell them about Jesus.

V. A Life of Commissioning (Isaiah 62:10-12)

Finally, Isaiah 62 concludes with Isaiah's version of the Great Commission. Verses 10-12 tell us how God's people are sent out.

*¹⁰ Go out, go out through the city gates;
prepare a way for the people!
Build it up, build up the highway;
clear away the stones!
Raise a banner for the peoples.
¹¹ Look, the Lord has proclaimed
to the ends of the earth, "Say to Daughter Zion:
Look, your salvation is coming,
his wages are with him,
and his reward accompanies him."
¹² And they will be called the Holy People,
the Lord's Redeemed; and you will be called
Cared For, A City Not Deserted.*

God's redeemed people are not called to sit and soak but to GO OUT of the gates of the Holy City. They are to prepare the way for new people to come into God's church.

We learned in Isaiah 60 that the gates of the city are never shut. This is the church today. As long as we faithfully preach the gospel, the gates of God's Holy City are open wide and welcoming all people into God's Kingdom if they will but turn from their sin and trust Jesus.

This is how Isaiah tells us that we ought to live as we march to Zion together as a local church. One day we will reach that beautiful shore, and when we do, we will do what our closing song says: *Feast in the House of Zion*. This is a wonderful hymn. I love the last line of verse 3:

*And from the garden to the grave
Bind us together, bring shalom
We will feast in the house of Zion.
We will sing with our hearts restored.
"He has done great things,"
We will say together.
We will feast and weep no more.*