



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

ADVENT: FREEDOM ISAIAH 61:1-11 • 12/17/23

MAIN POINT

Jesus Christ fulfilled the mission of bringing the good news of salvation to the world; as Christ's followers, we glorify God by telling the good news to the lost.

INTRODUCTION

When have you delivered surprise good news from someone to another person or group?

Why were you selected to deliver the news? What reactions did you receive from the recipient(s)?

Most people prefer to be bearers of good news rather than bad news. Managers would rather tell their employees of an upcoming pay raise than an impending layoff. Doctors would rather give their patients a clean bill of health than a diagnosis of disease. Parents would rather tell their children that a new brother or sister is on the

way than to announce, “Mom and Dad aren’t going to live together anymore.” Bearers of bad news often get blamed; messengers of good news often share in the joy of celebration.

God called Isaiah to be a prophet in the latter half of the 8th century B.C. to deliver bad news to the people of Israel: a message of judgment on Jerusalem because of the people’s sin (Isa. 6:1-13). That judgment came two centuries later when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Lord’s temple in 586 B.C., taking most of the survivors into captivity to Babylon (2 Kings 25:8-12). Throughout his long prophetic ministry, however, Isaiah also saw glimpses of good news. He saw that God’s far-reaching, greater plan was to provoke His people’s repentance, in light of which the Lord would rescue them out of captivity and restore them to the promised land. The closing chapters of the Book of Isaiah emphasize God’s redemption and restoration of His exiled people and the city of Jerusalem. Chapter 61 reveals that one day God would send His anointed Messenger of good news to establish a new covenant community. That community, in turn, would take up the priestly mission of glorifying God before all the nations of the world.

UNDERSTANDING

READ ISAIAH 61:1-3.

What good news did the prophet foresee and announce to the Israelite exiles in Babylon? What authority did the speaker in 61:1-3 have to make such an announcement?

From his vantage point as the Lord’s prophet, Isaiah foresaw God’s judgment in Jerusalem’s destruction and the people’s exile to Babylon in 586 BC. He also foresaw God’s salvation coming decades later as Babylon fell to the Persians and Old

Testament heroes such as Ezra and Nehemiah led the exiles home to rebuild Jerusalem, the Lord's temple, and the faithful covenant community.

Much debate surrounds the identity of the first-person speaker in Isaiah 61:1-3. Was Isaiah referring to himself or to some other individual? Explain.

The Spirit's empowerment of this proclaimer of good news (61:1) more likely points to the Servant-Messiah introduced in 42:1. Jesus stood up to teach one day in the synagogue of Nazareth and purposely read aloud Isaiah 61:1-2. After the reading, He declared to His amazed listeners, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:21).

Of course, the good news announced in 61:1-3 first held out great hope for the exiles' deliverance and return to Zion (Jerusalem). These exiles would be healed, liberated, shown the Lord's favor, comforted, and replanted like "righteous trees" in the promised land. Their deliverance and restoration would bring glory to the Lord as the nations saw God's faithfulness to His people. Ultimately, Jesus revealed that He was God's anointed to bring the good news of God's salvation from sin to the lost world (see Mark 1:14-15). Salvation transforms the believer and gives them joy where there was mourning, and hope instead of despair. The believer's transformed life testifies to others of God's glory.

READ ISAIAH 61:4-7.

In the Old Testament, God promised that His covenant people would be a "kingdom of priests" (ex. 19:6; compare Isa. 61:6). In what ways do Christians serve today as the Lord's priests?

Isaiah 61:6 recalls the covenant the Lord made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. There the Lord promised that His covenant people would be His "kingdom of priests and ... holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Isaiah prophesied that the returning exiles would once again be called "the LORD's priests" (Isa. 61:6). The apostle Peter picked up on this idea to declare that the New Testament church fulfills this same calling as

“a holy priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5) and “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). As a holy priesthood, part of every believer’s mission is to teach others about the one true God and His ways. We are to live out the gospel of salvation by example and tell others about the Lord and His gracious offer of forgiveness and new life in Christ.

READ ISAIAH 61:8–9.

How important is it to you that God loves justice (61:8)? Explain your response. How can we as God’s people show that we love justice, too?

In these two verses, the Lord speaks directly through the prophet. The Lord wanted to emphasize His unchanging character. He loves justice and hates injustice. That He had punished His covenant people by allowing them to suffer defeat and captivity did not mean He was unfair. Isaiah 24:5 declares that the earth’s inhabitants (including the people of Israel) were the ones guilty of breaking the covenant. After the exile, the Lord would renew His covenant and restore His people to the promised land. Further, the restored covenant community would serve as a testament to the world of the Lord’s faithfulness and blessing.

Similarly, the apostle Paul urged believers to live out their salvation as the “children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom [they] shine like stars in the world” (Phil. 2:15). In other words, when we as believers live in obedience to Christ and His teachings, we display the light of God’s salvation and bring glory to Him (see Matt. 5:14–16).

READ ISAIAH 61:10–11.

What response did the prophet foresee the redeemed exiles expressing?

How can the practices of righteousness and praise by God’s people provide a testimony of God’s glory “before all the nations”?

Here the prophet broke into a hymn of exuberant praise to the Lord. He did so in response to the revelation of the coming Messiah-Servant (61:1-3), the promise that both Jerusalem and the covenant community would be rebuilt and renewed (61:4-7), and the Lord's declaration of faithfulness to His people (61:8-9).

Just as Isaiah foresaw the glorious return of the exiles to a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed covenant community, his vision foreshadows the building up of the church as the body of Christ in the here and now (see Eph. 4:15-24) as well as the "new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2) in the eternal life to come.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

As a follower of Christ and member of the new covenant community, how do you feel about being called a priest? What would it mean for you to live like the Lord's priest this week?

In practical terms, how can you and your group help fulfill Christ's mission as described in Isaiah 61:1-3?

PRAYER

Praise God for sending Jesus to fulfill the mission of bringing good news of forgiveness and new life to the world. Thank Him for calling and equipping believers to be His gospel messengers at this time in history. Commit to obey Christ's commission to tell the lost about the gospel wherever He leads. Ask the Lord to show your group practical ways to carry on His mission.

COMMENTARY

ISAIAH 61:1-11

61:1-3 Much debate surrounds the identity of the first-person speaker of the first three verses of this chapter. He identified Himself as having the Spirit. This reference provides a connection to the Servant on whom God had placed His Spirit. Isaiah 11:2 states of the Messiah that “the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him.” It is significant that 61:1-3 uses the language of anointing from which the word Messiah (“anointed one”) comes. Thus, it is best to consider the first-person speaker in this oracle to be none other than the Messiah-Servant. Jesus identified Himself as the embodiment of this passage when He read these verses in a synagogue, to the amazement of all who heard Him (Lk 4:16-30).

61:1 The description of this future day as one in which prisoners will be freed and the poor will receive good news associates this time with the Jubilee, where slaves were freed and land reverted to the original owners (Lv 25).

61:2 The same act can be designated as displaying the Lord’s favor as well as God’s vengeance, depending on whether a person is on God’s side or not.

61:3 This verse emphasizes the reversal of fortune (from suffering to restoration) expressed in chapter 60. The reference to God’s people as righteous trees is reminiscent of Psalm 1 and the opposite of what is said of them in Isaiah 1:30-31.

61:4 The Babylonians devastated Jerusalem and its surrounding towns and villages in 587 b.c. The oracle looks to the future when the cities will be restored and rebuilt.

61:5-6 Like chapter 60, this oracle repeats the themes of foreigners serving rather than oppressing the people of God as well as the wealth of the nations flowing to Jerusalem. The idea that all of God’s people will function as priests toward the nations points back to Ex 19:6 where God told Moses that the Israelites would be “My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.” Because of their failure to function in this way, God had brought judgment against His people.

61:8 According to 24:5, God's devastating judgment had come on Israel because it had broken the everlasting covenant, but now God will establish it anew with His restored people.

61:9 In the Abrahamic covenant, God promised that Abraham's descendants would enjoy great blessing, which pointed to happiness and prosperity.

61:10 Isaiah broke out in a hymn of praise in response to the oracle he had just delivered. He used the theme of clothing to describe his taking on God's salvation and righteousness. These were not just any clothes but the clothes of a bride. This image implies the metaphor of God as husband of His people.