

The Year of the Lord's Favour
Isaiah 60: 1 – 22

Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah 61, verses 1 to 11. Before we read the text, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, as we come now to hear from your word, I pray that you would bless both the reading of the word and my preaching from the word. Please help me to speak as you would have me speak, to speak the words and the truth that comes from God. Father, let me not know the fear of man, but speak only the words that are pleasing to you. I pray, Father, that you would help us all as we listen. May we be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 61, starting at verse 1: “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 favour, 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; 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.” Amen. And may God bless His word.

Well, we've read from Luke chapter 4, where Jesus takes the introductory two verses of our passage and applies them directly to Himself. It kind of settles all arguments. It's interesting, I read a lot of things preparing to preach, and I notice many of the commentators are really very hesitant to say who's speaking in Isaiah chapter 61: Is this Isaiah speaking? Is this Isaiah

speaking of himself? “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” Or they say, Is it the servant speaking—the servant whom earlier in the book of Isaiah we’re told will have the anointing of God’s Holy Spirit?

Well, the answer is obvious. One, Isaiah is speaking. Isaiah is the author. Isaiah is the God-inspired author of Scripture. Isaiah could easily be speaking of himself in his own time, in his own context. Very easily, it could be Isaiah speaking of himself. And yet, we know from the way that the text is used in the New Testament, that ultimately, the one speaking is indeed the servant, the Son of God, the Messiah. It is Jesus who is speaking through the prophet Isaiah.

So we can say, Isaiah speaks and Jesus speaks. When God breathes out His Scripture, those who are the authors of our Bible, they weren’t receiving dictation. It wasn’t like digital reproduction—dots and dashes, and it’s perfectly copied. They were people. Everyone who was an author of Scripture was a person.

You say, What’s the point of saying that? Well, I’ll put it to you this way: If God had me, now—and this is an “if”; it doesn’t happen now; the canon is closed; the Scripture is complete—but if God had me writing Scripture, I would write it in my native language, which would be my version of Australian English, which I know many of you find amusing. I would use phrases I’m familiar with and words I know. Yet God would so oversee the production of that Scripture that everything I wrote would be from Him, and exactly according to His will. God spoke through, by, and from, the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah’s language, using Isaiah’s own words and thoughts.

And God, by His Holy Spirit, so oversaw that process that every word that Isaiah wrote was breathed-out Scripture—Theos-pneumos, or Theos-pneustos, from the New Testament—where in Second Timothy chapter 3, verses 16 and 17, we’re told “all Scripture is breathed out by God, and is profitable for teaching, for correction, for reproof, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete for every good work.” And that’s what we have here. Isaiah speaks, and the Lord Himself speaks through Isaiah, not just the Lord, but the Lord in the person of the servant, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who came to the earth to save a people for God.

So when Jesus in Luke chapter 4 takes this text and applies it to Himself, we’d best understand exactly what it is that Jesus is saying about Himself. Now He said, “In your ears this prophecy is fulfilled.” But what does that mean? What exactly does He mean when He says, “In your ears this prophecy is fulfilled”? Well let’s have a look at a few of the things that are built into the text that Jesus quotes and applies to Himself.

First of all, He’s the servant spoken of in Isaiah chapter 42:1, and Isaiah 48, verse 16. Just have a look very quickly at the first line of Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me.” The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me. And now turn back to Isaiah 42, speaking of the Lord’s chosen servant, and let’s just read verse 1. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

Who is He? He's the servant of the Lord. Who is this servant? Well, we've already looked through the four Servant's Songs. Some of the commentators actually call Isaiah 61 the Fifth Servant's Song. They think that it is just straight out another song of the servant. The one who speaks has so many things in common with the one who speaks in the other Servant's Songs that they're really quite certain that it's the same person. I tend to agree with them. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon this servant. "I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."

Stay in the book of Isaiah, and move forward to Isaiah chapter 48, and there I want us to look at Isaiah chapter 48 and verses 16 and 17: "16 Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.' And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit. 17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.'"

Back there at verse 16: "And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit." And those of you who were here when we looked at this section of the book of Isaiah, will remember that we worked out that once again here, speaking to us through Isaiah, was none other than that anointed, Holy Spirit-empowered servant of the Lord God, whom we know as Jesus Himself. And so Isaiah 61 starts with, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

Furthermore, as we read earlier this morning from Isaiah chapter 11, what was the main feature of the one spoken of in Isaiah chapter 11? We're told that He's of the root of the stump of Jesse. Just turn back there quickly if you want to. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." But what are we told about Him? "And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD."

So Jesus, when He takes Isaiah 61 and applies it deliberately and knowingly to Himself, is saying, "I am the shoot from the stump of Jesse." Now interpret that. Jesse was the father of King David. Remember the promises that started with Noah. They've come to Abraham, they've come to Judah, they've come to the house of David. Well, the house of David culminates, or comes to its fulfillment in Jesus Himself, who was called "the Son of David," and the Holy Spirit is upon Jesus.

So turning back now into Isaiah 61, we find that the one who brings in and fulfills the promises of the Davidic covenant that is spoken of in Isaiah 55:3, and in Second Samuel chapter 23—we won't turn to those verses, but it's called the steadfast, sure mercies of David, it's called an eternal covenant—the one who brings in and fulfills that covenant is the one who is speaking here in Isaiah 61. Once again, we know Him as our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the last line of verse 8 of Isaiah 61: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them"—an everlasting covenant, which is that reference back to Isaiah 55—"and the sure mercies of David." This covenant is brought into place by the one who speaks, Jesus.

The second thing that I want us to see concerning Jesus and His application of Isaiah 61 to Himself from Luke chapter 4, is that He says that the primary work of His ministry will be to proclaim. It will be to teach. It will be to speak. Let's have a look at what it says. It says three times in the first two verses that He's going to be speaking.

Isaiah 61, verse 1, in my Bible, it's the third line: "to bring good news to the poor." To bring good news. You speak, you proclaim the good news to the poor. Looking at the second last line of verse 1: "to proclaim liberty to the captives." And the first line of verse 2: "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour." He has come, anointed by the Spirit of God, to do specifically what? Proclaim, teach, preach.

Turn to the gospel of Luke chapter 4 one more time, which we did look at earlier, and notice: Jesus is baptized, Jesus goes out into the desert, Jesus is tempted or tested by Satan. Looking at Luke chapter 4, verse 14: "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he *taught* in their synagogues, being glorified by all."

Luke doesn't say, "And He healed the sick, and He raised the dead, and He cast out demons." That all comes later. But what does Luke say, and what does Luke want us to see is the thing that Jesus did as the result of the fact that He was filled with the Spirit and that He had conquered Satan, that He had taken authority over Satan? "He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all." He taught. He proclaimed. The gospel is to be proclaimed. The power of the gospel is tied up in the proclamation of the gospel. The word has to be spoken, and as it is spoken, it is spoken as the very word of God.

In the book of First Thessalonians, the apostle says that it's great and that it's wonderful that you Thessalonians have received our words for what they are—the very words of God. He says that in First Thessalonians chapter 2. But in First Thessalonians chapter 1, he speaks of how pleased he is with the Thessalonian church because it's preaching the gospel, and he says, "The word of God has sounded forth from you." The word of God has sounded forth from the church.

They received the word of God as what it was, the very word of God. This produces a transformation in the people, and they now are proclaiming the gospel to the people around about them, and Paul is basically saying that every time they proclaim the truth of God that's revealed in the gospel, they're actually speaking the very words of God.

And this is the ministry that Jesus came into the world to do. He came to proclaim. Now, did He come to die for the sins of the elect? Certainly. Absolutely, certainly. He came to die, to purchase, to redeem, to bring people out from the prisons in which they were bound, looking there at verse 1 of Isaiah 61. He came to do these things, but these things, the works that Jesus accomplished, can't be separated from the teaching that Jesus gave. It's the teaching that came from His lips that defines and shows us the value of the work that He did.

If all Jesus did was heal, if all He did was show forth miraculous powers, and then He was crucified, and then He was raised again, what would we actually know of the purposes and the plans of God? What would we actually understand of the gospel? Not very much. There'd be a whole lot of strange religions in the world, as there already are a whole lot of strange religions in the world—people who claim they're Christians, but they don't know a thing. The world's full of them. It's His teaching. The words He spoke are validated by the works He did.

The works Jesus did themselves are not the gospel. The miracles He performed are not the gospel. It's the *proclamation* of the gospel, it's the preaching of the gospel, it's the teaching of the word that is this thing the Messiah must accomplish. The miracles confirmed that He was speaking the truth. The very fact He was raised from the dead, according to the Apostle Paul in his introductory paragraph in Romans chapter 1, confirmed that He was indeed the Son of God.

Paul's kind of saying, His preaching was so radical, the things He taught were so amazing, that if He were not raised from the dead, you really would have no reason to believe Him. The raising of Jesus from the dead was the confirmation of the fact that He is indeed the Son of God who fulfills that which was prophesied.

Moving on in our text, I just want us to focus down in verse 2 on that first line: "To proclaim the year of the LORD's favour." To proclaim the year of the LORD's favour. Now there's a biblical background to this phrase. Turn back to the book of Leviticus, in chapter 25. We're going to look at Leviticus chapter 25, reading from verse 8:

"⁸ 'You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years,'"—now that would be forty-nine years"—"so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. ¹¹ That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you."

Now what's that all about? Well, in Levitical law, if things went wrong, if a person basically went broke, went bankrupt, he could sell himself into what we would call slavery. But that slavery could be no longer than forty-nine years. And at the end of the forty-ninth year, in the fiftieth year, what's proclaimed throughout the land? Liberty to the captives. That proclaiming of liberty that we see there in Leviticus 25:10, "and proclaim liberty," that's exactly the same phrase that you find in Isaiah 61, verse, "to proclaim liberty to the captives."

To proclaim liberty, to proclaim freedom—imagine! You've gone thirty-five years in slavery to pay off your debts. You've done thirty-five years of servitude, and you know on the fiftieth year, he has to let you go. And not only that, the law actually says he has to let you go with a blessing. He has to let you go with food and wine. He has to send you away with money. Your debt is

finished, it's gone, it's been released. You go home. You go home to your land, your clan, your cluck—try all over again, start all over again.

Well that's the background to what is being said here in Isaiah, "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." It's the proclamation of liberty, it's the proclamation of release, it's the proclamation that you're being set free. But you're being more than just set free. It's not enough for a person to have their sins forgiven and for the scales to be balanced. That wouldn't help.

If at the moment of conversion, all that was done for me was the slate was wiped clean, the good deeds and the bad deeds were placed in equilibrium, and it was then left up to me from that time forward to make sure that I clung, you know, I walked in the right way, I walked in the way of the Lord. You know where I'm going to end up—I'm going to end up in hell.

It's not enough. It's not enough to have your record cleansed. It's not enough to have the scales balanced. What's got to happen? You've got to become positively righteous in the sight of God. You've got to be someone whom God looks upon and says, "There! That one is mine! He's righteous in my eyes. That one is a son of mine. That one belongs to me!" How can we be that, my friends? Well, the law pointed to it, didn't it? The man was released with a blessing.

And here's the thing, my friends—not only are we cleansed, not only is the record taken away, but we're imputed with, or accredited with, the positive righteousness of Christ—the righteousness that's spoken of here in our passage. I'm looking at Isaiah 61, verse 3: "That they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified."

Or if we look towards the end of the passage, Isaiah 61, verse 10, we see that someone is singing: "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." He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

Now there are many who think that it may well be the servant who's singing that song. What they're saying is that God is seeing the servant's work and delights in them. Now that makes sense. But a bride adorns herself with jewels—"As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels." I tend to think that the one singing in verses 10 and 11 is the redeemed and saved church, the people who have been saved.

And so what this is saying is, We, my friends, we who are in Christ—we've been clothed in the garments of salvation. We've been covered with a robe of righteousness. In Christ, we are actually seen to be as righteous as Christ. This is not a question of how you're feeling, right? This is not a question of the way you feel. This is a question of what God says. God says, "You were a sinner, you are now saved, and you are righteous in my Son."

I'm not saying God doesn't see that we need to be changed and transformed. Scripture tells us we're to be transformed. We are to be sanctified. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to be

made Christ-like. And that begins from the moment of our conversion, and it continues all through our life till the day we actually meet Christ Himself, face-to-face. That's ongoing sanctification. But justification tells us that we have been counted righteous here and now, in the very sight of God Himself.

And Jesus came forward "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." He wasn't talking about a literal year. It was a literal year when He Himself took it and applied it to Himself. We see it recorded in the gospel of Luke chapter 4. That was a year, whatever year that was—30 A.D., somewhere around about there. But it's still being proclaimed. Every time the Scriptures are read, every time the gospel is preached, what are we saying to people? "Now is the time! Now is the year of the Lord's favour. Now is the time of salvation. It's time to repent! It's time to put your faith in God! Your sins will be forgiven!" So it's a very, very long year to proclaim "the year of the Lord's favour."

If we just turn quickly to Second Corinthians chapter 6. In Second Corinthians chapter 5, Paul speaks of the fact that we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where all of our works will be judged by fire. He then goes on to speak about how, therefore, we all fear the Lord and we all preach the gospel. And Second Corinthians chapter 5 finishes with the line, "He who was without sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God." That's the context. He's defined, clarified, preached, taught this doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Then look at how he goes on, starting at Second Corinthians chapter 6, verse 1: "¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.'

"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."

But go back. What is he saying to these Corinthians? "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And that word there, "favorable," is the same word that Jesus uses when He quotes the Septuagint in the gospel of Luke chapter 4, "Now is the year of the Lord's favour." It's a favorable time. Why is it a favorable time? Because Christ has paid the price for sin. Because He has risen from the dead. Now is the time. Now is the time to do what? It's the time to put your faith in God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and to be cleansed, to be saved, to be made Christ-like.

Imagine. Go back to that day. Imagine you're one of the faithful remnant in Judah. Your nation has basically been on a downward spiral from the very beginning. Our regular reading this morning came from the book of Judges. What was happening in the book of Judges? A nation destroying itself. Earlier on in the book of Genesis, we were told that God wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis of their sexual impurity, their uncleanness, their wickedness to those who were around them.

Well, in what we read in Judges chapters 19 and 20, Sodom and Gomorrah had moved into Israel, to a town called Gibeah, in a tribe called Benjamin, where they had behaved just as the Sodomites had behaved, where the same wickedness had happened. And we're told the city was to be burnt with fire. And Israel was just on this downward spiral.

God appoints a king. First of all, they choose for themselves a king, and they get King Saul. He did not arrest that downward spiral. He was not a faithful man. Though in many ways he tried, and he did do some good deeds, yet in the end, he was found wanting. He lacked that which he needed.

God appoints King David, and pours out His Spirit upon him. And David, and then David's son Solomon, take the nation of Israel to its heights. The old covenant height is when Solomon reigns in Jerusalem. The whole nation is divided, there's a king, you have a temple, you have temple worship. That was Israel at its best. From thereon in, downhill they go. The nation divides, the kings get worse and worse.

Occasionally, God sends a good king who tries to reverse the flow. And as long as he's alive and as long as he's faithful, things get a little better. But then he dies. How many of the good kings were followed by a faithful son? It didn't happen. It just didn't happen. For one generation, they got relief. For one generation, things went the way they should, and then after that, they just continued in the downhill slide, till you get to the very end of the nation of Judah. King Josiah dies, his sons are unfaithful, and the nation is destroyed.

That's the situation you live in. If you are a faithful, believing person, your nation gets taken off into slavery, in Babylon—what an embarrassment. God broke you free from slavery in Egypt, and now He sends you to slavery in Babylon. The only difference between Babylon and Egypt is where they lay on the globe. Send you off to Babylon, and there you're in slavery.

And then God sends you back to Jerusalem. And we read, for example, in the prophet Haggai, that they rebuild the temple, and then Nehemiah and Ezra attempt to rebuild the city and the temple, but it's a poor imitation of what was built before. The older people who were among them cried when they saw how poor, how humble, was the temple that had been built in the place of that which Solomon had constructed.

Then the waves of invaders just roll across you. It's like you don't exist. The Greeks—Alexander; the Romans. Every now and then there's a little bit of relief while a faithful Jewish man stands up. But there's no king, there's no true theocracy. The nation's a laughingstock. Until finally Rome moves in, and Rome says, "Your God is just one god among many gods. We pay Him no great respect. We do what we can not to annoy Him." The Romans were incredibly superstitious. They believed in bad luck. But as far as they were concerned, YAHWEH, the God of the Israelites, was just another god among many.

And all of this time, you've got this faithful remnant, hearing the promises of God's prophets, "The day will come. The day will come. Deliverance will come. Salvation will come. God will act. God will change things." And then finally, you get Jesus, in this nowhere town called Nazareth. Nazareth was nothing impressive in the Jewish mind. Finally you get Jesus, and He stands up and He reads from the prophet Isaiah, "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 favour."

You see, you've been in darkness, and now suddenly, you're in light. You've been wondering, Where's the Savior, and now suddenly, you're in the presence of the Savior. You say, "Well, why did so many people reject the Savior?" They weren't looking for the Savior. They weren't looking for the Savior that Scripture had promised. They weren't looking for the Savior that Isaiah had spoken of—the servant who suffered, who dies, the servant who purchases a people with His own blood. They weren't looking for that Savior. They didn't want to move forward into what God reveals in His Old Testament and calls the new covenant. They simply wanted to reestablish the old covenant—the old covenant which could not save.

What was the weakness of the old covenant? It's not the laws and the stipulations that were part of the old covenant. The law is good. Everything about the law is good. The law comes from God. What was the weakness? The weakness was that the people could not and would not keep the law. Why? Because their hearts were hardened. Their hearts were hardened, and so in Jeremiah 31, when the prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant, what does he say? He says, "God will write the law on their heart." Those who are recipients of new covenant grace will have the law written upon their heart. And that will mean that it's not a covenant like the old covenant that could be broken. And the example of the metaphor given is that it could be broken like a marriage could end in divorce. "Though I was their husband," says the Lord, "they broke the covenant." It's not that kind of covenant.

The new covenant will be a covenant where the law of God is written upon the heart, and salvation is eternal—true salvation, not the inheritance of a nation or a city; not the peace that comes from you personally getting involved in a war and killing your own enemies. And that's the peace that they were seeking. The peace that Jesus brought to the earth, in a way, also brought warfare. Didn't Jesus say that families would be divided, that one would turn against the other? The peace that Jesus brought to the earth was the peace between a sinner—forgiven,

cleansed, counted righteous in the sight of God—and God Himself, the peace that is the result of the favour of God.

The proclamation of this gospel is the proclamation of a gospel that transforms humanity, that transforms people. And that's my third major point here. This gospel transforms. Looking at Isaiah 61 and verse 2: It comforts those who mourn. Looking at verse 3: It grants 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." It transforms. It awakens.

In the gospel of Matthew chapter 5, verse 4, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Where do you think He got the idea from? His own Scriptures. Remember, Jesus spoke through Isaiah. Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted. The people who are saved are saved in the sight of God, and are given eternal life in the sight of God through faith in the servant whom God sends forth.

Dropping down to verses 10 and 11: "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."

I want you to turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 21. We'll read the first two verses. "¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

It's a reference—it's a reference by using the same words, or the same phrase. The Apostle John has taken a phrase from the book of Isaiah and he's used it to describe the church—the church, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Looking back there in Isaiah chapter 61, verse 10: "As a bride adorns herself with her jewels." Via the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's a citation.

And then looking at verse 11: "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." Sprout—that word should awaken us. Sprout.

Turn back once again to Isaiah chapter 11, verse 1. Let me give you a slightly different reading to what it says in the ESV. "There shall come forth a sprout from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." That's exactly the same word. "There shall come forth a sprout from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."

What's happening here? What's the work of the Savior, this Messiah sent forth from God with a proclamation of the gospel doing? "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.”

Once again, Isaiah refers back to Isaiah. It’s not surprising. He wrote the prophecy. He refers back to his earlier prophecy, and says, “See whom I’m speaking of. I’m speaking of this one, this shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots that bears fruit.” Well, what’s the fruit of this work? What’s the fruit? “Righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.” The gospel transforms. It takes sinners, trapped in sin, slave-bound to sin—the one who sins is a slave to his sin—and it proclaims liberty! Freedom!

What’s the difference between a sinner who’s saved and a sinner who is unsaved? A sinner who is saved is not a slave to his sin. That’s most certainly one of the differences. I’m not saying we don’t feel temptation. I’m not saying that we can’t be tempted. But I’m saying that we have the means of victory over temptation, just as Jesus had the means of victory over temptation. We are blessed with the same indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are blessed to be counted as sons of God. Righteousness and praise sprout up before all the nations.

The whole world hates the church at this moment. Have you noticed that? Persecution seems to be stepping up everywhere, even here in what was once the Christian West. The whole world hates the church. What do they hate about the church? Well, you know, they hate God. I mean, they’re at enmity with God. They’re unsaved. But what’s the message of the church? What’s the message of the true gospel? “You’re a sinner. You’re a sinner, and you’re going to come to God for judgment. You can’t save yourself. You don’t have sufficient righteousness. You’re damned. You’re finished. Your only hope is repentance. Your only hope is the confession of sin and faith in Christ.” A proud world doesn’t want to hear that message.

Furthermore, the world has its Caesars. They’re all over the world—proud leaders, people who think that they actually have the power to change the nature of humanity. And they don’t want to be told, “I’m sorry. I’m not going to worship in your temple, and I’m not going to say that Caesar is Lord, because I happen to know for a fact that Jesus is Lord.” They don’t want to hear that. They’re God in their own eyes. They imagine that they’re the saviors.

Notice something. How do you get—I mean, there’s some young folk here—how do you get someone from your generation to do anything? How do you get someone from your generation to do anything? Have you noticed it? Have you noticed what it is? You convince them that doing it is a righteous deed.

How do you get someone from your generation to vote for gay marriage? Convince them that voting for gay marriage is a righteous deed that grants freedom to homosexuals. How do you get someone from your generation to vote for abortion? You convince them that the poor women of this world are oppressed by pregnancy; that they should have the choice of choosing whether or not they wish to be pregnant. It’s a good deed to vote for abortion. How do you get them to vote for crazy economic policies that will destroy nations and put people out of work and bring in

starvation? You convince them that in voting for the Greens, they are saving the world, and that is a good deed. They'll do anything.

All right, how will the world convince them that it would be a good thing if Christians were rounded up and put into concentration camps, reservations, call it what you will—who knows? Slaughter camps? Who knows? I don't know. How would you convince them that this is a good thing? Christians are the problem. You teach them that Christians are the problem and that the law that the church proclaims is the problem. You see, we proclaim a law. And what does the law say? It says everyone is unrighteous. It says, You're sinners. It says that following your own desires takes you to hell. It says you were born a sinner and you've been a sinner all your life, and all of your own desires are sinful, and those sins take you to hell.

Well what if you can get a generation and convince them that the only problem they've got, and the only reason no one is happy is because those nasty Christians are proclaiming the law. You would be perfectly happy in your homosexual transgenderism if you did not have bigots telling you that it was a sin. If we could just silence those bigots, happiness would reign. It would be a good deed to vote for a law that silences those bigots! They'll vote for it. They don't care about freedom. They don't even understand the concept.

True freedom in a political sense means that people whom you disagree with have a right to speak, just as much as you have the right to speak. It means that you're going to get offended by some things that some people say, and it means that other people are going to be offended by some of the things that we say. They don't get that. They don't understand that they will vote away freedom if they believe that it was the right thing to do.

So the world rebels against God. And the Caesars of our world, those proud leaders who believe that they have the power to change the world and to change the people in the world, "if only I had control"—they long for power because they honestly believe if they had God-like power and control over humanity, they, being the enlightened ones, will make it better for the vast majority of humanity, according to their definition of "better"—according to *their* definition of "better."

And they hate the righteousness of God. And they hate hearing a gospel message that says, "No, you are wrong. You are not Lord. Jesus is Lord. You are not a savior. Jesus is the Savior. Your laws are not good. They are evil. The law of God is good." They don't want to hear that message. So they rebel against it, and they reject the gospel, and they turn against the church. And persecution steps up.

Do you want to know why the Communist party in China is persecuting the church? It's really simple. The church there has been growing so quickly that they are now scared of it. There are more Christians in China than actual paying or subscribing members of their ruling Communist Party. They are scared of it. They want to shut it down. That's why. They can't stand the fact that the church in China says, "No, government is not God. No, the supreme president is not God. God is God. Jesus Christ is His Son, and He is my Lord and my Savior." And they can't

stand that thought. They simply can't stand the fact that someone would rebel against their enlightened ideas.

Look at the people who are likely to come into power in our nation in the next six months, if things don't change. They think the same thoughts. They think the same way. They communicate their thoughts in supposedly democratic language and the language of freedom, but the truth is, they want control of everything—education, the way people speak, the things that we can read, the things that we can't read.

They hate the church. Though they say, "We're not discriminatory," you know they're lying. They might not even know they're lying, but you know they are. The very ideological foundation of their politics is anti-Christ—anti-Christ, anti-Scripture, anti-Revelation, anti-God. It's anti-Christ. They hate. They hate the God-fearing church, the Bible-believing church, the gospel-preaching church. And they will—I'm absolutely certain of it—enact law upon law upon law, slowly chipping away at it.

If they came out and said out in the open, "You know what? We're going to bring in legislated governmental religious discrimination. All Christians must be silent in the public arena," there's still enough people in this nation who'd stand up and say, "No, you can't bring in that kind of law. You can't bring in that kind of law."

But, step by step, millimeter by millimeter: First law: No Christian is allowed to speak about Jesus within two hundred meters of any surgery or clinic that practices abortion. And everyone says, You know, that's actually good, because they shouldn't be upsetting those poor, downtrodden ladies who are going to cut babies to pieces. That's a good law.

Then they say, No Christian is allowed to offend any LGBTQIABCD, blah-blah-blah-blah, by saying it's a sin. Because they should be allowed to be happy in what they're doing. Let's make that against the law. Let's make that hate speech. Let's silence them. And I'm telling you, there are now generations of Australians who will say, You know, no one should be offended by anything that anybody says, and I think it's a good idea that those nasty people were silenced. Another millimeter. Another millimeter towards what? Control. Installing themselves as God.

No Christian parent should be allowed to withdraw their children from school over the issue of, well, all of that transgender and homosexual teaching that is now built into every curriculum of every government-funded school, whether that school calls itself a private school or not. No Christian parent should be allowed to withdraw their children from those lessons. That's a form of child abuse. Once again, there are people out there who will say, Yeah, you know, no, those Christians really shouldn't be allowed to do things like that. They shouldn't be allowed to be going against the world and telling everybody that everything is wrong. And there's another millimeter along the way to total control and shutting down the church.

Just remember this. Our enemies don't run out of energy. They just don't. In Revelation 12, we're told that Satan comes down with great wrath because he knows that his time is short. He's got a certain amount of time to do all the harm he can do.

All right, these people who want to destroy everything, they wake up every morning trying to work out a new way to destroy everything. They don't have peace. They don't have peace with God. We wake up, and we plan a day that gives glory to God, in one way or another. And I'm not necessarily saying that that day is a day of formal worship. But obedient work is giving glory to God. Love in a family is giving glory to God. Home Bible studies and worship all give glory to God. We don't want to go out and change the world, other than by preaching the gospel to see lives transformed through conversion.

They want to change the very structure of the society in which we live, and they will not rest—they never rest. They wake up in the morning thinking, I want this. How do I get to it? How do I make it change? They never rest. That's why they're winning, because the church too much wants to rest. Not enough people in the church want to speak and fight.

God needs to revive His church and pour out the same Spirit of the Lord on us that was poured out upon the Savior. Now the promise of God is that He is poured out upon His church. But, once again, the Apostle Paul says, in an ongoing sense, be filled with the Spirit. And I think that we as Christians sometimes fail in an ongoing sense to be filled with the Spirit. And by that, I certainly don't mean any Pentecostal thing. I simply mean that we're not always seeking to serve God in all that we do, and give glory to God in all that we do.

Said all that? Sounds like bad news? I tell you, don't be disheartened. Just remember, the last page of the Bible, it tells us what? God wins. The Lamb wins. If you're a Christian, you're on the winning side. Whether in the time in which we live is a time where things seem to be going backwards, or whether we could've been born in a time where things seemed to be going forwards and the blessings seemed to be poured out from heaven, like the Great Awakening. In the end, on the last page, we know this—God wins. There will be a new heavens, there will be a new earth. God's people will dwell therein in the presence of the Lamb, and enjoy eternal blessing forevermore.

But my friends, the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel—that's what the church is here for. God sent His Son into the world. God's Son preached the gospel. He worked many works that validated His preaching, the greatest of which was that He was raised from the dead on the third day.

Christ sent His church into the world to preach the gospel, to keep proclaiming the same good news. Why? Because now is the year of the Lord's favour. It's a very long year, but I'm telling you, it comes to an end. At some time, it comes to an end. Now is the day of proclamation. Now is the day of salvation, repentance, faith. Now is the day in which Christ is building His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Now is the year of the Lord's favour.

Let's not waste our time and waste our lives. Let's live in the service of Christ, proclaiming His gospel. That's the victory.

Whatever happens around us, to us, whatever happens in our nation and in the nations around us, the victory is that the gospel is proclaimed and that people are called to faith and repentance. Faith in Christ, repentance towards God, eternal life. That's what we're here for. That's what the church is here for. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do give you thanks and praise that you did send your Son into the world, and that He, having returned to you, has sent your Holy Spirit to your church. Father, we pray that in the power of your Holy Spirit, we would be obedient, we would be faithful, we would be gospel-preaching Christians in a gospel-preaching church. Help us, Father, to never fear the world, to never fear Satan, but to fear you and you alone. For we know that in the fear of you, the power of God is unlocked, and that in the fear of you, we shall be your obedient people. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.