

GOD’S GOOD NEWS PEOPLE **(Isaiah 61:1-11)**

I have a question for you. What sells newspapers—good news or bad news? What are the lead stories on the evening news—good news or bad news? Most of the news that we read and watch is bad news—economic turmoil, natural disasters, international conflict, violent crime, personal tragedies, and the list goes on. Quite often on the nightly news, after depressing us with a litany of all the bad things that are happening, the broadcast will end with an uplifting, feel-good, personal interest story, thus enabling us to conclude watching the news with a warm smile rather than a heavy groan.

In our bad news world, we desperately need to hear or read something that lifts us up rather than puts us down. There is a reason that Paul wrote these words to the church in Philippi:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

Back in 1993, two motivational speakers went against the grain. They published a collection of their best, inspirational stories. That book became a *New York Times* best-selling book. Through the years, over 11 million copies of that book have been sold. It carried the name *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. It didn’t take long for that team to realize they had discovered a formula for publishing success. That one book spawned a library of 275 separate titles in the Chicken Soup series. You can find books for the pet lover’s soul, for the teenage soul, for the scrapbooker’s soul, for the golfer’s soul, everything you could imagine and then some. Together, they have sold over 500 million books making it the number 1 paperback book series of all time.

The secret sauce really isn’t all that secret. If you tell people inspirational stories, poignant stories that uplift them, they will listen; they will pay money to buy and read those stories. Our hearts are hungry to hear and read true stories that inspire and strengthen us.

I want you to know that God has entrusted to His Church the truest and best story that hungry hearts need to hear. We call that story *the gospel*, and that word means *good news*.

At the beginning of November, I began preaching a series of messages from Isaiah. At the outset, I said I was not going to preach verse-by-verse through one of the longest books of the Bible. Instead, I noted that Isaiah is known as “the fifth gospel.” It would be more appropriate to refer to Isaiah as “the first gospel.” Approximately 800 years before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their gospel accounts, Isaiah the prophet, led by the Spirit of God, foretold the coming of God’s Servant, and he revealed to us many gospel truths.

In this series of messages, we have sought to trace some of the good news messages that Isaiah revealed to us. We will conclude this series next Sunday with the twelfth and final sermon in this short journey through Isaiah.

Our first sermon came from the first chapter of Isaiah in which God calls out to a rebellious people. He said to them, and He says to us:

“Come now, let us reason together,”
says the LORD:
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.”

Two weeks ago, we looked at the fourth and final Servant Song in Isaiah in which we find a clear and moving depiction of what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is in Isaiah 53 that we read those incredible words:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all (53:4-6).

In this 53rd chapter of Isaiah we find the good news of Jesus clearly proclaimed by the prophet more than seven centuries before the events described happened. The good news is that when Jesus went to the cross, He became the substitute of all those who would trust Him as Savior. On Him was laid the iniquity, the sin, of every one who would receive Him as Savior and Lord.

Because of Jesus and what He did, we have a message to tell. We call that message *the good news*. Isaiah himself used that very language. Seven times in this book, Isaiah uses the phrase *good news*. The last time it shows up is in today’s text—Isaiah 61.

Jesus claimed that He was the fulfillment of what Isaiah had written in this passage. He was the one who was anointed to bring good news. After His resurrection, Jesus told His followers, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.” He commissioned them to make disciples wherever they went. In the eighth verse of Acts 1 we read, “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth.”

You and I are heirs to that commission.

In South Texas, along the gulf coast, there is a city called Corpus Christi. When my kids were young, I took them there. I discovered my son is not a fan of salt water. The name *Corpus Christi* is actually a Latin phrase that means “the body of Christ.” As the Church, we are the Corpus Christi, the body of Christ in this world. We are to allow Him

to do through us what He would do if He were here physically Himself. I am convinced that He wants to do through us the very things He did when He was here the first time.

In Isaiah 61 we get a pretty good picture of what Jesus was to be about and by extension, the very things to which we are to give ourselves. We are going to go through this chapter and look at three activities that are to characterize “God’s Good News People.”

God’s Good News People Have Been Given a Message to Proclaim

Let’s look at the first three verses of Isaiah 61. According to v. 1, if we are going to give ourselves to the mission of proclaiming the good news, we must first receive a super-natural endowment for that mission.

This agrees with what Jesus said. I quoted part of Acts 1:8, but I left out the first part of that verse where Jesus informed His disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” We can’t be His effective witnesses unless and until we receive His Spirit. Jesus cautioned His disciples in Luke 24:49, “But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

If we are not impelled and empowered by the Spirit of God to tell the good news, the words we speak will lack the urgency and the blessing of God. The Spirit of God was given to the Early Church on the Day of Pentecost, which was 50 days after Jesus was risen. We believe the NT teaches that now, every believer receives the Spirit of God at the moment he or she trusts Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The first three verses comprise a single sentence and within that sentence are seven infinitive phrases. You learned in grammar class that an infinitive begins with the word “to.” In my version, the first infinitive says “to bring good news.” The NIV and many other translations use the word *preach* rather than “to bring.” The third and fourth use the word *proclaim*; so, three out of the first four infinitives focus on what we do with our mouths.

There is power in the spoken word, and that is especially so when the word that is spoken is the word of God. If I stand up here and tell you cute little stories, there is no power in that. My words, regardless of how eloquent that may be or how forcefully they are spoken, they lack the power to change anyone’s life. But if I speak the word of God, regardless of how stuttering or stammering they may be spoken, those words can alter a person’s earthly direction and eternal destiny.

Look at the audience to whom we are to speak—the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the bound, and those who mourn. Our primary ministry is not to the beautiful people, to the well-heeled, to those who we think can help us make our budget. We are to reach out to those who are sick, to those who are drowning and who know they are drowning and who are ready to grab a lifeline if we will throw it to them.

It is interesting that when Jesus read this passage in the synagogue of Nazareth, he stopped halfway through v. 2. He didn’t read to his audience about the day of God’s vengeance. Why do you suppose that was the case? The Day of God’s Vengeance is coming. It will come when Jesus returns. Right now it is the Day of God’s Grace. We need to hold out that grace while we still can.

One of my heroes in ministry was a man named R.C. Sproul. He went to be with the

Lord in 2017. He was a brilliant author and a captivating speaker. He said that when he was a young man studying for the ministry, an older pastor asked him a question. The man said, “R.C., is the Church an army or a hospital.”

R.C. answered quickly, “The Church is an army.”

The pastor confessed that it was a bit of a trick question. He claimed that the Church is both. The Church is both an army and a hospital. We are to be the Church militant. Jesus is our Commander. We are to follow Him into battle. Our enemy is not those in the world who are not yet a part of the Church. We are not fighting them. We are fighting for them.

When Jesus returns, the Church militant will become the Church triumphant. Jesus will be shown to be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Satan will be shown to be the defeated foe that he is, and his defeat will be complete and eternal.

Yes, we are an army, but we are also a hospital. Many of our soldiers are bruised and broken. They come for hope and healing, and we need to minister to the wounded and to those who are battle-weary.

To the poor, we can preach the good news Jesus preached. Luke records Jesus’ words this way: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”

To the brokenhearted, we can bind them up with the sure promises of God.

To those who are captive and to those who are bound, we tell them of the liberty and freedom that is theirs through the work and ministry of Jesus.

To those who mourn, we can comfort them with the comfort we have received from the Holy Spirit.

Verse 3 pictures those who are dressed for a funeral. We can tell them, “O, Friend. You are mistaken. God has not invited you to a funeral. God has called you here for a wedding, and it is not just any wedding. It is your wedding.” From the Lord’s hand, we can supply the bride with the veil and the wedding attire, as well as the perfumed body oils to magnify both her beauty and her joy.

I work as an on-call chaplain for a local hospital. A few years ago, that health care system of which the hospital is a part decided that hospital employees can no longer perform weddings in or on the hospital property. That rule was presumably passed to protect chaplains from possible lawsuits. If a chaplain performed the wedding of Jack and Jill, some might take offense if he refused to marry Bob and Bill.

Well, the Church is still in the wedding business, and every time we marry a groom and a bride, we celebrate the greater wedding of Jesus and His Church.

I have good news to announce and so do you: “Church, take off your funeral clothes and put on your wedding attire. You have a wedding to attend—yours.”

God’s Good News People Have Been Given a Task to Undertake

Look at v. 4. Isaiah was looking forward to a time when God’s people would return from their exile in Babylon. When they returned after being gone for 70 years, they would find that their homes were destroyed and their city devastated. They would be faced with a massive, rebuilding project.

In the same way, God has undertaken a huge, rebuilding project. God is in the process of rebuilding broken lives, broken marriages, broken hopes, and broken dreams.

I want you to understand that the Carpenter from Nazareth is calling you into the family business of rebuilding that which is broken. Look around you and look within you, and you will see brokenness all about.

Think of some of the rebuilding projects that Jesus performed.

- Jesus took a despised tax collector and made him into an honored disciple.
- Paul was a Jewish persecutor of the Church, and Jesus transformed him into the apostle to the Gentiles and maybe the greatest missionary and church planter the world has ever known.
- Jesus took a son of thunder who had both a hot and quick temper and made him into the apostle of love.
- In the words of David McKenna, Jesus made “a madman into a family man.”
- Jesus transformed a condemned criminal who hurled insults at him into a paradise-bound believer.

What has Jesus done in your life? How has he changed you? If He hasn't or isn't in the process of changing you, then you have not really met Him.

In his commentary on this passage, David McKenna offered four applications of this text to the work of the Church:

1. *The primary task of the church is to be the servant who serves others.*
2. *The servant church exists to produce servants.*
3. *The church is to be the rebuilder of ruins.*
4. *The servant church is to be the priest for strangers and foreigners.*

Notice how v. 8 begins. According to Ray Ortlund, justice means “the way human life and human society are supposed to be.” Robbery and wrong are the opposite of justice. God wants to use you, and me, and His people to rebuild society into what it is supposed to be. That is what Jesus taught us to pray for: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In addition to praying for it, we are to work towards it.”

Bob Dylan had a haunting song entitled, “Everything Is Broken.” It was recorded back in 1989. Here are the lyrics to the second and the fourth verse, which was the last:

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

Broken hands on broken ploughs,
Broken treaties, broken vows,
Broken pipes, broken tools,
People bending broken rules
Hound dog howling, bull frog croaking,
Everything is broken

In addition to everything, we can also say that everyone is broken. God is all about mending broken things and broken people. He wants to do a work of restoration in your life, and more than that, He wants to use you in the restorative work He is doing in the lives of those around you. That is the task we are to undertake as God's good news people.

God's Good News People Have Been Given a Reason to Rejoice

The primary verses I want us to look at are vv. 10-11, but there is an element of rejoicing found in vv. 7 & 9. There is great joy to be found in joining Jesus in His rebuilding work. How can you not rejoice when lives are reclaimed and put back together for the glory of God?

God through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit will do for you what all the king's men could not do for Humpty Dumpty. He will put you together again, and He will do that for your family members, and friends, and neighbors, and co-workers when they give their hearts and lives to Him.

As we look at vv. 10-11, remember that Jesus claimed this passage applies to Him. He is its fulfillment. That means, the one who rejoicing in vv. 10-11 is Jesus.

McKenna explained:

Here is the meaning of human history. God intends to prove, through Christ, how much He can love and bless ruined human beings. And His love is of the nature of delight. The Jewish people long ago thought they were forsaken. Sometimes we do too. But God comes and changes the subject. The gospel announces that, if you are in Christ, God *delights* in you.

I want to close this message with the first verse of the next chapter—Isaiah 62:1. To understand this verse, we must recognize what Isaiah means in this verse by *Zion*. To what is he referring? It is true that *Zion* is often used in the OT to refer to Jerusalem, but I don't think that is what Isaiah has in mind in this verse. *Zion* also refers to the Kingdom of God.

If that is the case, Isaiah is saying, "For the sake of God's kingdom, I will not remain silent."

Let me ask you, what value do you place on the Kingdom of God? Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." If the reign of Jesus as King in your life and the lives of others is important to you, you can't keep silent. You must speak up and speak out by telling the good news to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

We will close by reading a hymn that we don't sing but should. It is hymn #293. Listen to the words of the four verses:

1 Rise up, O Church of God!
Have done with lesser things.
give heart and mind and soul and strength
to serve the King of kings.

2 Rise up, O Church of God!
His kingdom tarries long.
bring in the day of Christians all,
and end the night of wrong.

3 Rise up, children of God!
The church for you doth wait,
her strength unequal to her task;
rise up, and make her great.

4 Lift high the cross of Christ;
tread where His feet have trod;
As followers of the Lord of all,
rise up, O Church of God.

Church, we are God's good news people. He is calling us to get up, to stand up, to step up, to rise up, and to speak up. If you are not willing to do that, then get out of the way because Jesus and His Church are moving forward.