

# Isaiah 61

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[ 0 : 00 ] Isaiah 61. I read a great article this week on the recruitment and the growth of ISIS.

! And the author, Graham Wood, in the Atlantic, made the point that the growth of ISIS is not primarily due to any disillusionment of young Islam and Muslim men, but the growth of ISIS is not to do with unemployment or poverty or discrimination or lack of education. Nor is the Islamic State a mere collection of psychopaths. Rather, Graham Wood writes that it is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs. And among them is that ISIS is a key agent in the coming apocalypse. It considers itself a harbinger and a headline player in the imminent end of the world, end quote. So, the belief that ISIS has about the Day of Judgment determines its strategy. It's really fascinating. It's essentially an apocalyptic sect that is ideologically driven. And as Wood points out, therefore, young people from the West who've been travelling to the battlefield, the square of the field, they're not going there for liberty, they're not going there for riches, they're not going there for the good life. They are going there because they see there a convincing belief structure. And so ISIS, as far as we're concerned, may be crazy, but they're not insane.

And I start with that because I think there is a shocking overlap between ISIS and us. It is a really, really slim overlap. Really, really slim, but it is a real one. Because if you were to spend time with the people of this church, you would see that we live, and the way that we live, is because of a certain belief structure. Our lives are theologically driven. I hope our lives have a vision of the end of the world, and what comes after it. We're told in the Bible, quite clearly in the New Testament, that we are to live in the present, in accordance with the hope that we have for the future. Now the differences are, between that movement and ours are so, so different. And the nature of that vision, and of how that vision will be achieved, it's why theology matters. It's why what you fundamentally believe about the future matters.

We will, and we can throw our hands up in the air, in despair, at the sickening atrocities that we see and we hear that are perpetuated by ISIS. But unless you and I have got a robust counter-argument to what they're doing, we are ignoring the root of the issue. We have a vision of the future, and we must live in the light of it.

[ 3 : 21 ] So last week in Isaiah 60, we saw what that grand vision is. It's a new city, it's a new Jerusalem. The new heavens and the new earth, inhabited by God's people with a new culture.

And as we saw, Jesus right at the centre on a throne. And his people will come from every tribe and tongue and nation, and they will be citizens of the new city. And it's a glorious vision.

But the question is, how is that vision achieved? Isaiah has been showing us all the way through this book, that the realisation of the new city is dependent on a person.

And as we turn from Isaiah 60 to 61, we are introduced to a person whom Isaiah has brought to our attention. So at the end of chapter 59, here's what we saw, can you see?

My spirit is upon you. As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord. My spirit is upon you, and my words that I put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring, says the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore.

[ 4 : 27 ] That's how chapter 59 ends. But here's how chapter 61 begins. Chapter 61, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

Do you see the parallel? He's anointed me. The same person who the Lord placed his spirit, in whose mouth the Lord put his words at the end of chapter 59, is the same one who's speaking at the start of chapter 61.

So the conclusion is this. Everything we read in chapter 60, everything is between those two bookends, those references of the spirit of the Lord being upon this individual.

Everything in chapter 60, the vision of the future, is dependent on this person. The new city. And the key to ushering in the new city is this person at the end of 59 and the start of 61. Now before we look at the identity of this person, let me state to you what I think is the big invitation. What does Isaiah 61 want you to do? And it is this. Seize the year.

[ 5 : 34 ] Seize the year. Carpe anim. For those of you who are into Latin. Carpe anim. Seize the year of the Lord's favour.

That is where Isaiah is going to go with this chapter. And we are going to think about this as we think of three things. The jubilee job description. The extravagant exchange. And then the year before the day.

So first of all the jubilee job description. And we have got to work out whose job is this job description. It says, who is speaking here at the start of chapter 61. And again notice how he starts. The spirit of the Lord is upon me. Because the Lord has anointed me. Now we have been right the way through Isaiah haven't we? It has been really great.

If I say so myself. And all the way through we have seen glimpses of this. Remember chapter 11. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

[ 6 : 33 ] A branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him. And when we looked at it we saw that. Isaiah 11 is a prophecy of a king in the line of Jesse.

Jesse was the father of King David. That it was a prophecy of their king. Their messianic king. On whom the spirit of the Lord would rest. That was Isaiah 11. But do you remember Isaiah 42? Behold my servant whom I uphold. My chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit on him. He will bring forth justice to the nations.

And so God introduces to us. In that chapter the servant of the Lord. Isaiah 42. The suffering servant. Of 42, 49, 50 and 53.

And God says my spirit. My holy spirit will be on him. But here is the jaw dropping thing. Of Isaiah 61. The king of Isaiah 11. And the servant of Isaiah 42.

[ 7 : 37 ] Is here in chapter 61. The speaker tells us that the spirit of the Lord is upon him. And then he goes on to describe what he is going to do. And in such a way.

That he is clearly the king. And he is clearly the servant. He is the one who will reign. And he is the one who will rule. And he is the one who will suffer. And will die. The king is the servant.

That is what Isaiah 61 tells you. And what he then does. Is he explains that God has appointed him for a specific purpose. Which are covered in this menu of transformation. Sort of verses 1 and 2. To bring good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the broken hearted. 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.

And the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn. Notice right away. The servant king has been anointed to deal with body and soul. With inside and out.

[ 8 : 36 ] He preaches good news to the poor. And he binds up the broken hearted. And the word of God.

And the headline of this announcement. And the part of the job description. That surely would have jumped out to Isaiah's audience. Was that this servant king. Can you see it? Will proclaim freedom. Freedom.

And the reason why those words would have jumped out to the first listeners of the book of Isaiah. Is because of the command given in Leviticus 25 verse 10.

To proclaim freedom. As a sign of the Jubilee. Now I can see you are all really excited about this. Let me tell you why you should be excited about it.

What is the significance of the Jubilee? When you need to go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. Where we are told. God created the world in the space of six days.

[ 9 : 34 ] Six days of creation. And on the seventh day God rests. God has a Sabbath. And God then commands all his people. And all people. That they are to rest on the Sabbath day.

It is a demonstration. That every human being. Is to rest in God's provision. And his goodness. And his goodness. But when you read on in the Old Testament.

You find that God's people were not only to observe a Sabbath day. But they were to observe a Sabbath year. And during the Sabbath year. All debts were to be forgiven. The slaves were to be set free.

Land was to lie fallow. And if you were going to eat. You had to eat out of your storehouses. Not out of what you grew. Where you gathered food.

Since the last Sabbath year. You can only imagine can't you. What that kind of forgiveness felt like. What must that experience of liberty be like.

[10:35] But then in Leviticus 25. We find out that not only was there to be a Sabbath day. And a Sabbath year. But there was to be a Sabbath generation. That every seventh seventh year. That is the 49th of the 50th year.

There was to be this Jubilee. A year of Jubilee. And in that year. Not only did you rest for your neighbours. Like you're commanded to every Sabbath day. And not only were debts forgiven. Like they were every seventh year.

And not only were slaves to be set free. But any capital that you lost. Any land that you'd forfeited. You got back. Can you imagine that? The mortgage wiped out.

The family home that your parents sold. Because they couldn't afford to keep up the payments. And get back. And the whole purpose was to give people a second start.

If you've absolutely blown it. The Jubilee would give you a second chance. A running start. A fresh beginning. It was the way in Israel they prevented long term poverty and deprivation.

[11:39] And so God institutes the Jubilee year. For the Sabbath generation. For Sabbath rest. For economic rest. Scholars think it was so radical.

That they actually doubt Israel ever practiced it. But now the servant king turns up. And he announces in his preaching. Like a ram's horn.

That he will usher in the year of Jubilee. Now let's wind the tape forward. We go forward eight centuries. And imagine that you are sitting on the floor of a synagogue.

In Nazareth. And up front is the local lad. It's the carpenter's boy. He fixed a coffee table in your rocking chair last year. It's Joseph's son.

And Joseph's son has become quite famous. In these parts through his teaching. And through miracles. And Joseph's son has been invited to come and read. And comment on the scripture.

That day.

[12:37] And so the attendant hands Joseph's son the scroll from Isaiah. And from what we know. There was no assigned reading that day.

Jesus unrolls the scroll. Himself. He looks for the passage he wants to read from. And eventually he finds it. And he begins to read this. He says the spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Because the Lord has anointed me. To bring good news to the poor. He sent me. To bind up the broken hearted. 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. He rolls up the scroll. He hands it back to the attendant. And the entire congregation has fixed their eyes on Jesus. And they're waiting to hear what he's going to say.

And they're waiting for what would have been normally a lengthy explanation. A long explanation. A long explanation of the passage. And Jesus gives a one sentence sermon.

[13:40] I know what you're thinking. If Jesus can't do it why can't you? And the answer is very simple. I'm not Jesus. He manages a one sentence sermon.

And here's what it is. He says. Today. This scripture. Is fulfilled. In your hearing. He says that. Jesus says.

You know the one. Isaiah was talking about. You know the one who was anointed to preach good news. To release the oppressed. It is me. I am he. I have come. And the reason Jesus only needs to preach a one sentence sermon.

Is because he's basically saying. I am the sermon. I am the sermon. My life is the sermon. I am the anointed servant of Isaiah 61. This in Luke's gospel. Is Jesus opening manifesto.

This is where he lays his cards on the table. And he says. This is what I'm all about. Isaiah 51. And he couldn't have been clearer. In his understanding of what he came to do. And he announces. He is the king.

[14:40] Who is the servant. Who will die. To usher in the jubilee. And so Isaiah 61. And so Isaiah 61 moves from the jubilee job description. To the extravagant exchange.

And what he tells us here. Shouldn't surprise us. If we've been in Isaiah these last few months. Because Isaiah has already told us. That the ministry of the servant. Sent us on an exchange.

Doesn't it?

Remember Isaiah 53. That famous passage. We read how the servant. Would swap places with us. That the servant would take. On the punishment. That you and I deserve for sin.

So that we can have peace with God. That is what Jesus comes to. That in our place. Condemned he stood. But here in Isaiah 61.

The focus is not so much. On what the servant generously takes. On our behalf. Our punishment. But more on what he gives. What he gives to repentant sinners.

[15:37] Look at verse 3. To grant those who mourn in Zion. To give them a beautiful headdress. A crown of beauty. Instead of ashes.

The garment of praise. Instead of a faint spirit. There's three glorious exchanges. Look for me at a moment.

Look at the first instead. So you have this crown. Or this headdress. Beautiful headdress. In verse 3. A headdress of beauty. Instead of ashes.

When somebody died. Back in the day. You would cover your head. With ashes. Not like a little. Kind of ash Wednesday cross. No. This covering with ash.

It symbolized. The pulling apart of everything. Just when you put. Something into fire. It gets burned. And everything gets pulled apart. It turns into ashes. In fire.

[16:34] Items lose their coherence. And they turn into ash. And the point is. That all of life. Is going that way. Isn't it? At the gravesite. I say these words.

Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. Because you and I. Are falling apart. No matter how much. You want to ignore it. No one can restore the energy. That is expending itself.

From our body. It doesn't matter. If you work out. It doesn't matter. If you go to the gym. It doesn't matter. If you take care of yourself. Every one of us. Is falling apart.

We are all going. The way of ashes. And the servant king. Announces. That for those who repent. There is the promise. Of an absolute makeover. There is the promise.

Of transformation. And he communicates. This transformation. Or exchange. Just with. Two Hebrew letters. Two Hebrew letters change.

[17:30] Changing letters. Can often make. A big change. In what you say. Can't it? So here for example.

Are a few hymn lyrics. That underwent. A significant transformation. With the change of one letter. Lord you are more precious. Than silver. Lord you are more costly. Than gold. I once was blonde. But now I see. Oh that was yonder. Sacred thong. Surely he has borne our briefs. They are terrible. They are terrible.

But one letter. One letter changes its own meaning. Doesn't it? One letter changes its own meaning. It is easy isn't it. To send an email quickly.

On a computer. And one typo. Change the whole. Context of the email. And here in Isaiah 61. We don't have to. Here in Isaiah 61.

[18:28] We don't have to. We don't have to. We don't have the change. Or the drop of the letter. But we have the switching. Of two Hebrew letters. It just switches round. And it changes the word. Ashes. To the word.

Crown of beauty. Now obviously you don't pick that up. In English. But the point is. Very clever. That Isaiah making. It is as if. Isaiah is saying. It is as easy for God. To transform your situation. As it is. For you and I. To make a typo. God transforms. Death. To beauty. Like that. That's how easily.

He does it. And Isaiah then tells us. The result of this. Extravagant exchange. Firstly. Those who repent of their sin. Will be called. Can you see it? In the middle of verse 3.

Oaks of righteousness. What a great picture that is. They feel like little tender shoots. But they will be called. Oaks of righteousness.

[19:25] The planting of the Lord. That he may be glorified. And this organic righteousness. Comes from slow maturing. As an oak tree does. It's a beautiful picture isn't it?

Of the fruitfulness. God brings over a long life. Lived for him. As we depend on him. Fruitfulness. For God's glory. That grows.

All of life. Second result of this. Extravagant exchange. Is that he says. Ruins will be repaired. Verse 4. 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. Just as we saw last time. Isaiah's audience. Would have looked. At this prophecy. And they would have thought. Jerusalem's going to be rebuilt. Following their exile. In Babylon. But as we saw last week. Isaiah 16. The vision's much greater than that. It's the vision of a new city. [ 20 : 24 ] A new Jerusalem. A heavenly Jerusalem. And interestingly. It's the mourners. Isn't it? It's those who mourn for their sin. Verse 3. Who become the repair experts. In verse 4.

That the servant king. Is going to use you. And me. As Christians. In this deep work. Of restoration. As God promises.

To rebuild. Everything that sin. Is ruined. And he's begun. That process already. He's using us now. In the rebuilding. Of humanity.

What good news. That is. In the film. Birdman. I haven't seen it. But I read it. As an illustration. This week. Um. The main character.

Is played by Michael Keaton. Who has a past. He has a faded career. Following his success. As the superhero. Birdman. And the role. Was clearly.

[ 21 : 19 ] The only. Thing of note. That he ever did. Which he was recognized. By him. And Michael Keaton's character. Thompson. He is haunted. By his former success.

And as the film. Develops. You hear him. Haunted. By. The superhero. Gravelly voice. Chipping away. His confidence. Reminding him. Of all that he used to be.

And what he isn't now. And all of us. Have those voices. In our head. That haunt us. And some of us. Have listened. Too easily.

To those voices. That haunt us. That your life. That lie. They've said. You are a loser. You have ruined. Your life. By what you've done. You have wasted. Your life.

You are pathetic. You will never amount. To anything. For the Lord. And you might as well. Give up. It's too late. To make the change. Now. And then you hear.

[ 22 : 14 ] The servant king. Come and announce. I have come. For the poor. And I've come. For the broken hearted. And I've come. For the captive. And I've come. For people like you. For righteousness.

That the Lord. will be glorified. That you. Shall be the one. Who shall build up. The ancient ruins. That shall raise up. Devastations. That is the voice. That you and I. Need to listen to. This morning. That as we come to Christ this is good news. And the third result of this extravagant exchange is an expanded people.

Derek Kidner rightly suggests that if we misread verses 5-9. If we see them as relegating the Gentiles to constant servanthood in his vision of future.

We read that wrongly. In fact we know from Isaiah that to read verses 5-9 in that way contradict the rest of Isaiah. Which show us the nations coming to Jesus.

[ 23 : 19 ] Particularly the verses of Isaiah 60. And so these verses in verses 5-9 of Isaiah 61. They refer to everyone who is in the reconstituted people of God.

And the picture is one of glad cooperation. Of former foreigners. Former outsiders taking their place in the life of God's people as insiders. And included in that is this promise in verse 6.

That you will be called the priests of the Lord. And so we know from the New Testament. That through Jesus Christ all who put their trust in him are now a kingdom of priests to God.

And so this third benefit. Is of this experience. Is an expanded greater people of God. Let's just go back to Luke 4 for some helpful commentary on why this expanded people is part of this passage. Jesus preaches his one sentence sermon. And the congregation in the synagogue in Luke 4. They absolutely love it. Not so much because it's brief.

[ 24 : 32 ] But because of what they think Jesus is saying. Because as they listen to Jesus through their particular framework or grid. Here is what they hear. As they hear Jesus in Luke 4.

They say. We are the good guys. And out there are the bad guys. And we've been promised that one day the Messiah is going to come. And he will lead all the good guys to victory over the bad guys.

And now he's here. Romans look out. The Messiah is here. He's just told us. Who would have thought that he was going to be Joseph's son?

Did you think it was going to be Joseph's son? I didn't think it was going to be Joseph's son. One of our own. Now let's get rolling. Let's get campaigning. They all love the sermon. And because they love the sermon.

Jesus knows they didn't get it at all. Which is not a general thing. He knew they didn't get it. Because they defined didn't they.

[ 25 : 31 ] The poor and the broken hearted. And the captives. As just themselves. That the Messiah was coming just for them. And Jesus realises he needs to redefine for his audience.

Who the poor and broken hearted are. He needs to dismantle the grid. Through which they've been filtering his words. So that they can hear who really is included.

For those whom the Messiah came. And to dismantle the grid. Jesus tells the congregation. That he'd come out. He'd come to reach out. To those whom the prophets of old had come to reach out to.

So he tells them. I came in the footsteps of Elijah. And Elisha. He references the story. In 1 Kings 17. Where God sends Elijah. Not to the religious respectable people.

The morally upstanding people of the day. But he sends Elijah. To a pagan idol worshipping. Gentile woman. From the land of Sidon. And Jesus is saying.

[ 26 : 35 ] The servant of God. A servant king. Has come to people like that. And in case the people don't get it. Jesus mentions a second story. From 2 Kings 5.

In the time of Elisha. Where God heals a man from leprosy. And of all the people. God could have chosen. The he and he chooses. Naaman. A foreigner. A Gentile.

A Syrian. And Jesus says. The servant king. Has come to people like that. And once the crowd. Hear Jesus supporting illustrations. Guess what they do. They try to kill him.

The servant has gone very bad. Isn't it. When the audience want to kill you. Their grid. Could not handle. An expanded people of God. That included outsiders.

And Gentiles. To whom the servant king. Was also offering. This extravagant exchange. But that is what the servant king does. Lastly.

[ 27 : 34 ] Let's see the year before the jubilee. The year before the jubilee. I don't need to tell you. That the murderous intention. That was not the reaction.

That God is looking for. In response to the coming servant king. The one who has been anointed. To bring liberty to the repentant. The response that God is looking to. Looking for.

For his servant king. Is the response that Isaiah demonstrates. Which is a model to you and I. Look at verse 10. I will rejoice greatly in the Lord. And my soul shall exalt in my God.

For he has closed me. With the garments of salvation. He has covered me. With the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom. And decks himself like a priest. With a beautiful headdress. And as a bride adorns herself. With jewels.

For as the earth brings forth. It 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 nations. The right response.

[ 28 : 30 ] The right response. To the servant king. And all he's done. Is joyful praise. And if the good news. Of the gospel.

And the gospel. And the gospel realities. Of this chapter. Does not move you. And does not lead you. To joyful praise. Then you haven't grasped. What he's saying.

As a result. Of what Jesus came to do. Those who trust in him. They are clothed. In garments. Of salvation. They are covered. In a robe. Of righteousness. That is not their own.

That God accepts them. Because of what the servant king. Has come to do. That he does not judge you. On the record of your life. Because if God was to judge you.

And me. On the record of your life. It would mean condemnation. It is God who clothes us here. It is God who saves us. It is God who covers us.

[ 29 : 27 ] With a righteousness. On our own. So that we can become righteous. And we can be called. Oaks of righteousness. That our salvation. Is all his doing. Through his son.

The servant king. But here is what this praise. Can look like. But practically. In the context of this chapter.

It means. Seize the year. Specifically. It means. Seize the year. Before the day. Look at verse 2.

To proclaim the year. Of the Lord's favour. And the day. Of vengeance. Of our God. To comfort all who mourn. It is very clear.

That the Lord. Has anointed his servant. To declare the year. Of the Lord's favour. The jubilee year. And the day. Of vengeance. Of our God.

[ 30 : 22 ] Now let's wind the clock forward. Let's go back. To the synagogue. And let's go back. To Luke. One more time. And I want you.

To look. How Jesus quotes this passage. So come with me. To Luke chapter 4. Alright. Wake the person up next to you. Luke chapter 4. And we're going to go to. Verses 18 and 19. And I want you to see.

How Jesus quotes the passage. Chapter 4. And verses 18 and 19. See that. Keep a finger in Isaiah. 61. You got it.

Page 860. It says. The spirit of the Lord is on me. Because he's anointed me. To proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me. To proclaim liberty to the captives.

And recovering of sight to the blind. To sell at liberty. Those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. He stops.

[ 31 : 21 ] So come back to Isaiah 61. He doesn't finish. Isaiah 61 verse 2. And you say. What's the deal? Could he just not remember the rest? Well of course he wouldn't. He was reading it.

Is Jesus squeamish. About God's vengeance. Does Jesus not like talking about judgment? Well no. Is. Does he not like talking about wrath.

Like so many people do today. Or did he think he had a better chance. Of getting out of there alive. If he didn't mention the V word. What's going on? Neither of those things. Jesus is making a point. Isn't he? Jesus is making a point. That in his first coming. He was ushering in the year of the Lord's favour. The Jubilee year. And that year continues.

And continues. And continues. And today it continues. Until a day in the future. When Jesus will come again. And it will be the day of vengeance. And that is when Jesus will return.

[ 32 : 18 ] And every single human being. Who has ever lived. Shall stand before him in judgment. The day of vengeance. Is still in the future. But today. We are in the day of God's favour.

So two applications. To seize the year. Means to turn to Jesus. It means to turn to the servant king. It means to accept his gift. Of eternal liberty and life. That in his mercy. He has given you. To accept the gift. That in his mercy. He has not ushered in.

The day of vengeance. The reality is. That day could come at any moment. Couldn't it? And it's only because of God's mercy. That the day of vengeance.

Hasn't come already. And even if. Even if it is a long way off. The day of his favour. Only lasts for you. Until the day you breathe your last breath.

[ 33 : 18 ] And so that can come at any moment. Can it? So seize the year. Accept the exchange. Come to the servant king. Who brings you good news. Who binds up your broken heart.

Who proclaims liberty to those who are in bondage. Seize the year. But for those of us who have committed our lives to the servant king.

The same message comes with a slightly different application. Doesn't it? We are still to seize the year. We are still in this year of jubilee.

We are in the year of jubilee. Until Christ comes again. And just as we saw that the mourners of verse 3. Become the repair experts of verse 4. So Jesus issues this challenge to his followers.

From my first coming. To my second coming. I want you to live in the light of my coming again.

Today is the day of salvation. There is no structured social policy.

[ 34 : 20 ] In the New Testament. People try and interpret Isaiah 61 in a really wooden way. Let's try and enact these laws. But it is good news to the poor. The gospel binds up broken hearts.

The gospel is liberty. It opens the gates of prisons. It means for you and I. Investing in the lives of those around us. To seize the year.

And proclaim to the world. That we have a vision of the future. That trumps any other vision. And it trumps any other vision. Because it involves God. Who through his own son.

And the followers of his son. Who proclaim good news to the poor. And bind up the broken hearted.

And proclaim freedom for captives.

Who have been released from darkness. And so let's proclaim. Let's proclaim. That today. Is the year of the Lord's favor.

[ 35 : 23 ] Let's pray.