

## *Isaiah 61 – Repairing the Ruins*

People of God, We are in the third week of Advent, and we are anticipating the coming of the Messiah to save God's people from all our sins and all our enemies. We have been reflecting on various passages from the prophet Isaiah, arranging them in such a way that they tell a story.

In our first sermon, we looked at Isaiah 64. We found ourselves standing amid the ruins of destroyed cities and the temple of God, surrounded by our enemies, who had raised the flag of their victory and occupation over us.

At the end of that first passage, we asked God if He would continue to restrain himself, and if he would hold his peace forever, and continue to afflict us? Will our defeat have no end?

Isaiah 40, our passage from last week, provided the answer to our question. "Comfort, comfort, My people, says Your God." God will no longer delay or restrain himself from saving his people. The Lord is now coming. So prepare the way of the Lord, so the glory of the Lord can be revealed. And when he is revealed, we will Behold, the Lord our God, for he shall come with a strong right hand and his arm shall rule for him.

Thus, when we concluded last week's sermon, the Lord had come and was standing before His people, looking over them and reveling in his great reward. Like the good shepherd, he gathered

his people into his arms to love and protect them. He has won the victory.

Now in this third week of Advent, we flip to Isaiah 61. After we have experienced the deliverance that the strong right arm of the Lord has won for us, we now hear about what this salvation has accomplished in us and through us.

And what we see is that the character of God's redeemed people is transformed. God makes us a Holy Temple, and a holy priesthood. Our service of worship and praise renews Creation until at last we come to a Marriage Feast in a renewed Garden of Eden, filled with righteousness and praise which springs up before all the nations.

Let us survey the passage in a bit more detail, and then come back and make some extended comments about verse 4.

Isaiah 61:1.

**“The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,  
Because the LORD has anointed Me...**

Jesus is the anointed one. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism. After coming out of the wilderness, He read this passage in the synagogue in Capernaum, and said, "Today, this

scripture is fulfilled in your hearing of it." Therefore Jesus is the one who is saying these words in Isaiah 61.

Next, we learn why our Lord Jesus has been anointed.

To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*;

Jesus tells his redeemed people that he has come to preach. He came to preach good news; he came to proclaim liberty; and he came to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

And His preaching is effectual and powerful. When He speaks, His word accomplishes the very thing He proclaims, because he is The Eternal Word of God. When He preaches good news to the poor and the afflicted, his word binds up the broken-hearted. When He proclaims liberty to the captives, His word unlocks the prison doors and breaks the shackles of those who are bound. When the Lord Jesus speaks, there is nothing that can stop Him from accomplishing His holy will.

<sup>2</sup>To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,  
And the day of vengeance of our God;

The acceptable year of the Lord is a reference to the year of Jubilee. Lev. 25 tells us that every 50 years all ancestral land was to be returned to the rightful families. All slaves were set free, all debts were forgiven.

Now Jesus stopped here when he read this passage in Luke 4 because he came the first time to save. But when he comes again a second time, then he will come with vengeance.

Connected to both these ideas of the Jubilee and the day of vengeance is the person of the kinsman redeemer. He is the one who redeems his people and sets them free. But he is also the Avenger of Blood, who seeks to redeem the life of his murdered family. He seeks life for life when he comes on the Day of Vengeance to avenge his martyred brothers and sisters.

This truth that he comes to restore and avenge provides:  
**comfort for all who mourn,**  
**and consoles those who mourn in Zion.**

The good news Christ has preached, healed the brokenhearted, liberated the captives, brought restoration, vengeance, and comfort.

His words of good news also transform us into priests. Which is indicated in the list of clothing he provides for us.

**To give them beautiful headdress/turban for ashes,  
The oil of joy for mourning,  
The garment of praise for the spirit of faintness;**

In this great exchange, Christ removes our ashes, and sadness, and gives us the garments of the priesthood! They consist of a crown-like turban worn by the priests, garments of praise, and anointing oil, just like the Messiah.

So the Messiah's preached good news recreates and transforms His people, making us like Him, like the Messiah. Christ is duplicating Himself, clothing a whole crew of anointed ones who will join Him in spreading the life of the new Eden.

This is why we are called Christians. For the Greek word for Messiah is Christ, which means Anointed One. As Christians, we too are anointed ones. And we also are supposed to be doing things that Jesus did. In a very non-heretical way, we are little Christs in the world, to bring about the renewal of all things.

This is why he has made us Christians, anointed priests who are clothed in garments of beauty and joy. Because he is rebuilding His temple to be a place for His glory and beauty to be seen. The next verse says:

**That they may be called trees/oaks of righteousness,  
The planting of the LORD, that He may be beautified.**

One chapter earlier in Isaiah 60:13 God's redeemed people are described as Trees that are used as timber to construct and beautify God's new temple sanctuary. And so we are.

And then v. 4:

**<sup>4</sup> And they shall rebuild the old ruins,  
They shall raise up the former desolations,  
And they shall repair the ruined cities,  
The desolations of many generations.**

Now that God's new priesthood is restored and His new temple is rebuilt out of oaks of righteousness, we also will rebuild the cities that had been ruined in the former devastation. God's priestly people are rebuilders of creation and civilization.

This work of renewal is going to include both Jews and Gentiles, who will work together to bring the riches of the nations into the New Temple.

**<sup>5</sup> Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,  
And the sons of the foreigner  
*Shall be* your plowmen and your vinedressers.**

**<sup>6</sup> But you shall be named the priests of the LORD,  
They shall call you the servants of our God.**

**You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles,  
And in their glory you shall boast.**

The shame that God's people once experienced when exiled from their land, having their temple destroyed, and their priesthood devastated, will turn into double honor and everlasting joy, as they are returned to their land, the temple is rebuilt, and the priesthood is reconstituted to bring the nations to worship God.

**<sup>7</sup> Instead of your shame *you shall have* double *honor*,  
And *instead of* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.  
Therefore in their land they shall possess double;  
Everlasting joy shall be theirs.**

All this is simply a matter of Justice for God. He is going to make all things right, and it starts with proper worship. He is going to direct their work in truth, and make an everlasting covenant with to preserve His people among the nations. And he is going to bless them abundantly, so the nations notice that they are the blessed people of God.

**<sup>8</sup> “For I, the LORD, love justice;  
I hate robbery for burnt offering;  
I will direct their work in truth,  
And will make with them an everlasting covenant.**

**<sup>9</sup> Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles,**

And their offspring among the people.  
 All who see them shall acknowledge them,  
 That they *are* the posterity *whom* the LORD has blessed.”

V. 10 and 11 conclude with the Lord rejoicing in God at a marriage feast. The Lord is wearing the garments of salvation and righteousness, which are described as the wedding garments of the Bride Groom and the Bride. This wedding takes place in a garden, and results in righteousness sprouting forth through the entire world.

<sup>10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
 My soul shall be joyful 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* with ornaments,  
 And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its bud,  
 As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth,  
 So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Having provided a survey of the passage, let us consider the significance of v. 4:



<sup>4</sup> And they shall rebuild the old ruins,  
They shall raise up the former desolations,  
And they shall repair the ruined cities,  
The desolations of many generations.

As we have just seen, Christians have been redeemed to worship God as His priests and holy temple. The life of Christ's Church revolves around worship and praise, which are at the center of our service to the world. As a holy priesthood, our mission is to restore the nations to the proper worship of the One True God and His Son Jesus Christ, so that righteousness and praise will flourish before all nations. Worship will bring about the renewal of creation.

However, this rebuilding and renewal project is not limited to worship alone. It extends to all of creation and all of life. It begins with worship in the church but continues beyond it.

As we sing in Joy to the World, *No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow as far  
as the curse is found.*

But here is what many Christians don't realize: they are the ones through whom Christ makes His blessings flow. His faithful and righteous worshiping priesthood share in His anointing to restore His creation and reverse the curse.

God never intended worship and praise to replace the rebuilding of creation. As if to say, we should not worry about injustice, oppression, or public idolatry because we can worship Jesus freely in our own hearts and behind the walls of our own church.

Instead, He meant for worship to be public, and the driving force behind the church's commission to rebuild the fallen creation. Which is the purpose of the Great Commission.

Likewise, Christ's kingdom rule begins in the hearts of men, but it doesn't end there. His Spirit-empowered priests are called to bring life and healing to a dying world, which has been devastated by sin, unbelief, and idolatry. This is why Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water that spring forth from the heart. According to Ezek. 47, the river of life flowed forth from the sanctuary and went throughout the whole land bringing life and healing everywhere it went. The only place it could not bring healing to was the swamps. Sorry Washington D.C.

Now, for those of you who are in the construction business, if you are rebuilding on top of an old site, you know that you must clear out the old rubble and debris first before you start to rebuild. And if any faulty foundations were previously laid those need to be removed knocked down, and cleared away. You cannot successfully rebuild if you are using a faulty crumbling foundation.

What is the faulty crumbling foundation that Christians need to remove before we can rebuild our civilization? What are the old ruins that need to be swept away before we can rebuild? **It is the First Amendment to the Constitution.**

In my sermon two weeks ago, I said:

“Christians have idolatrously put the Bill of Rights before the Bible. We even say things like, I might not agree with your faith, but I’ll fight to support your right to practice it.

And in the name of religious freedom, we have opened up this land to be a place where any and all gods can be worshipped. And so we have given ourselves to be oppressed by Demons! And our tolerance of false religion, and our tolerance of immorality, has led to Christians becoming oppressed in our land by those very same people we tolerated.”

Immediately after the service, Ben Doak approached me and asked if I had seen the news about the Satanic Altar at the Capitol building. I had not. I only learned about it right then.

Over the last week, my analysis has been confirmed. At the heart of modern-day Christian political theology is the corrupt foundation of secularism and neutrality. Christians who hold

public office are more concerned about upholding the First Amendment than they are the First Commandment.

Our State. Rep. Jon Dunwell, who also serves as a pastor of a Church in Monroe, let everyone know that his duty as a Christian state representative is to continue to advocate for Freedom of Religion. He disapproves of Christians wanting to take down the altar to Satan. He does not want the state to determine what is an appropriate expression of religion. And so he said he would rather have an evil blasphemous display, or no display, than have the state dictate what they think is appropriate.

The problem is that the state did display what they think is appropriate. And what they think is appropriate is to place Satanic altars on equal footing with Christmas Nativity scenes. Jesus and Satan are the same to our Christian government officials. At least they have the same equal footing at the Capitol building.

How did Christians find themselves defending State-sponsored Satanism? The answer lies in the rise of secularism, a form of political polytheism. According to this perspective, the government should remain neutral in matters of religion, a concept often encapsulated by the phrase "Separation of Church and State."

However, the original intent of the First Amendment, as envisioned by the founding fathers, was not a call for complete

neutrality. Instead, it focused on preventing the establishment of a national church, akin to the Church of England. The states were not prohibited from having their own established religions; for instance, Virginia once had Anglicanism as its official state religion.

The critical point here is that both the State of Iowa and the United States, in practice, *have* adopted an official religion—Secularism. This religion asserts that the government should maintain neutrality regarding religion. The flaw in this thinking, however, is the fallacy of neutrality. True neutrality does not exist; it is always a matter of deciding *which* religion will be established, not *whether* religion will be established.

So, I went to the Capitol building on Tuesday to take part in a prayer meeting, and I had the opportunity to talk to Rep. Dunwell. Besides being patronizing and disrespectful, he resisted the idea of Jesus Christ is the Lord over the state. He doesn't believe Jesus is the Lord NOW, only someday in the future, and so he rejects the notion of God's laws reigning supreme over the government now.

I appealed to a Christmas passage, Isaiah 9, in which it says,

*For unto us a Child is born,  
Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of His government and peace  
There will be no end,  
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,  
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice  
From that time forward, even forever.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*

I don't think this man ever even thought of this passage as relating at all to Christ's current reign from Heaven over the nations of men.

In fact, Dunwell thought that us Christians who want the state government to give preference to Christianity over Satanism and to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in our laws was akin to establishing a Muslim Caliphate, which spread their faith by the edge of the sword.

I then told him that the only person who has been given the sword was the civil magistrate. According to Romans 13, he has been given the sword to punish evil and reward the good. And in the context of Romans 13, evil and good are defined by the 10 commandments. It was then he laughed at me and told me I had no idea how to read the Bible.

He told me the kingdom of God was spiritual, and that it was manifested in the hearts of God's people. Which is why I have

been saying to you, that the heart is where it begins, not ends. His belief that God's kingdom does not touch the politics of this world is nothing less than Gnosticism.

And, his preference for political neutrality over Christianity is Secularism. By embracing secular neutrality, he avoids acknowledging Jesus Christ as the risen and reigning Lord of all, but he does not see that this reluctance to Crown Him Lord of All, emboldens the state to continue to promote more anti-Christian laws and practices.

If only the state would be explicitly Christian again, and uphold blasphemy laws that made it illegal to slander the Lord Jesus Christ and to promote anti-Christian beliefs and practices. Dunwell thinks that is the equivalent of Christian Caliphate. And here it was I thought that it was just traditional Protestant Christian beliefs concerning the civil magistrate.

The Book of Common Prayer says that the magistrate is to punish wickedness and vice and maintain true religion and virtue. Belgic Confession article 36, again, states that the magistrate...

*"...not only has regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also that they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of anti-Christ may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere,*

*that God may be honored and worshipped by everyone, as He commanded in His Word.*

Even the stripped-down version of the confession says this –

*And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship.*

*They should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them.*

*They should do it in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.*

Likewise, the American version of the Westminster Confession says, *God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers.*

It also says that the magistrate is to “maintain piety.” And as “nursing fathers” (which is a phrase used in Isaiah 49 to describe kings) the civil magistrate has the duty to protect the Church of our common Lord.



I briefly appealed to these documents to Rep. Dunwell, but to no avail. Sadly, people of God, the foundations of our once great republic and even more our once glorious Protestant and Reformed Church, have been rotting away because Christian ministers and magistrates believe that the First Amendment has more authority than the First Commandment.

Therefore, if we are going to be people who contribute to the rebuilding program in our land, there are certainly some idols that need to be toppled and cleared away first.

Many times in the past, when God's people sought to renew the kingdom, they were moved to tear down idols. King Asa did it. King Jehoshaphat did it. King Josiah did it. King Hezekiah did it. Elijah did it, and so did Gideon.

This was also the evangelistic method of St. Boniface. He went deep into the forests of Germany and found pagan people who worshiped the Oak of Thor. And thus to convert the heathen to Christ, he took his axe and chopped down the old oak tree, proving Thor was not real.

Just as there was no response from Baal when Elijah had his contest with the prophets of Baal, just as Baal did nothing when Gideon toppled his altar and cut down the Asherah poles, so likewise, Thor did nothing. For he is not a god. And the wood from the old oak tree was used to create a chapel dedicated to St.

Peter, to whom our Lord spoke these words – The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against my Church.

Thus, I wholeheartedly praise the work of Michael Cassidy who beheaded the Satan statue at the Capitol building. And the reason he gave as to why he did it. He said, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the Devil. And we are called to be like Jesus.”

Therefore, to establish the true worship of God in our land, to renew our nation, and state, Christians are going to have to faithfully worship Christ as the Lord of lords, and King of kings. There is no place where Christ’s Lordship is checked at the door. There is no place for neutrality.

Christmas is the time we celebrate the birth of our King. And thus, to rebuild our once-Christian nation, God’s people all over Iowa must repent of any conceptions of neutrality and Secularism we may have. And if we need to destroy any idols that prevent us from understanding this most basic truth, so be it. For it is here, upon this bedrock, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, that the foundations of all things rest. Christ is Lord. Amen.