

Isaiah 61:1-4

The Great Reversal

Introduction: We're doing this mini series on Isaiah 61 - it's such an appropriate text in light of the fires that ravaged our city last month. The People of Israel had finally experienced the judgment that God warned would come upon them for their rebellion, injustice and unrighteousness. The Babylonian army came, destroyed their city, burned the temple, ravaged the land, and took them captive to Babylon - That captivity lasted 70 years.

As we pick up the story the exile is over, the people have returned but the land of Israel is still desolate, they are still under foreign rule, the city walls of Jerusalem are still broken down and the temple is lying in ash and ruins.

The people of Israel are asking questions about God's goodness and faithfulness to them in the midst of this tragedy - for them it was a clear demonstration of God's judgment because of their continual rejection of him... I imagine people in our city are asking the same or similar questions... Why did this happen, Where is God? Is God good? Is there a God at all?

Asking questions about Identity - If I am displaced then who am I; If I don't have my stuff, my possessions who am I really?

Most likely so much doubt and fear, anxiety concerning the future - Will life ever be normal again, will I ever feel at home again?? Has God given up on me?

When your worldview and your reality come into collision and explode that's when you become a seeker; looking for truth; something more solid than before, a world view that matches reality.... This is what happened to the nation of Israel, and I imagine that this is what has happened for thousands of people in our city this last month.

As people in our city are "seeking" we want to be prepared to show and demonstrate a Gospel world view.

It is into Israel's worst nightmare, it's greatest national, local, religious and personal crisis that God speaks, **“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended.”**

It is into this grief that this amazingly glorious character appears -The Servant of the LORD....

The Servant of the Lord is anointed by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to comfort those who are mourning, to proclaim freedom to those who had been in captivity, to tell them this is the time of God's favor on them.. we looked at how this was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Life and ministry - Jesus was all about these things.. and if we are about following Jesus, if we are his people, we should be about these things as well....

This morning I want to consider verse 3 which deals with the radical transformation and reversal of the poor, broken-hearted, mourning, captives of Israel. Because if you haven't had a radical transformation from Jesus or understood the radical reversal of the Gospel you'll never join Jesus in his Kingdom mission..

1. What the Servant will do

1. We're told that the servant of the Lord will **"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.** We see this downward movement of transformation -from head-dress, to head, to covering garments - the idea is a total transformation of the whole person from head to toe.
2. **It says he gives a beautiful head-dress instead of, or in place of, their ashes.. what is this?**
 1. Ashes - In biblical times it was customary for people to sit in ashes or cover themselves with ashes to express mourning or loss, such as grief over a distressing situation like the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13:19), grief over a national disaster - like the

attempted wiping out of the nation of Israel in (Esther 4:1), or grief associated with repentance from one's own sin as the Ninevites in (Jonah 3:5-7). Ashes were associated with pain, loss and suffering, which is a key to understanding the phrase in question.

2. **Beautiful Head-dress** -All the of the biblical references of this term are associated with either a wedding turban or the Priestly crown or turban that Aaron the high priest and his sons wore. But we don't even have to go that far. Isaiah 61:10 tells us that - **"as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels..."**

1. What's being described is an exchange of pain, loss, suffering, shame and sin, for a wedding crown, or a priestly turban - a thing of great, honor, rejoicing and beauty.

3. **It says he gives the oil of Joy or gladness for their mourning.**

1. We might read this and simply think that Jesus takes our mourning and gives us the joy of the Spirit.. and you wouldn't be wrong but oil has a two fold purpose in scripture it was to signify God's spirit upon someone but also to signify that this person or thing was set apart for God's use..
2. Holy oil was only used for anointing kings, priests, and sanctifying the sacred things in the temple. Because Jesus was the Christ/Messiah, or "Anointed One", He could have been anointed with this oil. There is a Messianic prophesy in Psalms about the "oil of gladness". **"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."** (Psalms 45:7)
3. When Isaiah says that those in Zion will be given this oil of joy, he may be expressing that because of what Christ did for us, we can also partake in that holy anointing, implying our transformation into kings and priests to God, through the Spirit. We should understand this as bestowing on us both joy and the ministry of Joy - a priestly ministry of spreading joy.

4. **It says he gives the garment of Praise for their faint spirit**

1. Alec Motyer, a commentator on Isaiah says, that garments in scripture often speak of character; Isaiah 59:17 describes the Lord himself wrapping him self in "a garment of vengeance" and

“a cloak of zeal,” - he says donning garments symbolizes character and commitment - so here we have a fundamental change in garment symbolizing a change in character - a heavy spirit being changed to a rejoicing, praising, thankful spirit.

5. This is an incredible reversal that happens for the people of Zion - but the question is where does their ash, mourning, and heavy spirit go?

1. I think verse 10 gives us a good hint - The servant of the Lord speaks again and says, **“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, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”**

2. It becomes clear through this verse that the Servant of the Lord will not just give us a beautiful head-dress, oil of Joy, and beautiful new garments, but he will in fact give us HIS beautiful head-dress, his oil of Joy, and his garment of praise, salvation, and righteousness, while he takes our ashes, our mourning, our heavy spirit. As seen in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 -The Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, on the cross became a substitute for us. Our sin for his righteousness, our shame for his glory, our grief and sorrow for his oil of joy, our faint spirit for his garment of praise, our ashes for his beautiful head-dress.....

3. **But why has he done it? - “That we may be called Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord - in order that he may be glorified...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.**

4. **He gives us** - “A new name, a new nature, with new potencies” - Motyer

2. **What we must do..**

1. Yes, He takes our life our death and we get his life, his mission!!!!
2. Having been given the gift of his head-dress of beauty, his garment of righteousness, his oil of Joy -the priestly anointing by the Holy Spirit, we are unleashed on a world devastated by sin and the devil.

As this great exchange and reversal has taken place in our lives in that same way we offer it to others by both proclamation and demonstration...

3. The text shows clearly that the heavy spirited, ash covered, mourners of verse 3 become the repair experts of verse 4- showing that Gospel liberated people become a creative force for restoration..
 1. Paul tells the Church these same things again and again in his letters -**“And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” -2 Corinthians 1:21-22**
 2. **“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. - 2 Corinthians 5:18-21**
4. If we accept the fact that Jesus offers us forgiveness of our sin, gives us new life - eternal life, gives us his righteousness, and takes our sin in the work of the cross - then we must equally accept that he also gives us his mission.. you cannot have one without the other...
5. As I said last week we should be able to look around at the needs of our city or any situation for that matter and say - **“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 favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to 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” - that is exactly what this is telling us; and who better to do it than the community who has already experienced this reversal of fortunes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Christ redeemed us from our sin that we might live for him, that we might carry on his mission to the world... The church needs to reclaim this identity.

1. It is really only as we meditate on this and make this work of redemptive reversal, that Christ has done, our main focus that the fruit of it will spring forth into living action... does that really work??

3. **Miroslav Volf's Story** -

1. One day theologian Miroslav Volf was visiting a friend who pastors a church in Sand-town, a desperately poor and dangerous neighborhood in Baltimore. As Volf's friend was explaining the blight of inner city life, the friend pointed out a powerful but largely untapped resource for renewing places like Sand-town—the biblical doctrine of justification by faith.
2. Volf was shocked because, as a professor of theology at Yale, he knew that many in the church had abandoned the doctrine of justification by faith. Even people who defended it rarely applied it to social problems like poverty, violence, and hopelessness. As Volf walked with his friend, he thought, How could the dead streets receive life from a [seemingly] dead doctrine?
3. But after thinking about it, Volf reflected: Imagine that you have no job, no money, you live cut off from the rest of society in a world ruled by poverty and violence, your skin is the "wrong" color—and you have no hope that any of this will change. Around you is a society governed by the iron law of achievement. Its gilded goods are flaunted before your eyes on TV screens, and in a thousand ways society tells you every day that you are worthless because you have no achievement. You are a failure, and you know that you will continue to be a failure because there is no way to achieve tomorrow what you have not managed to achieve today. Your dignity is shattered and your soul is enveloped in the darkness of despair. But the gospel tells you that you are not defined by outside forces. It tells you that you count; even more that you are loved unconditionally

and infinitely, irrespective of anything you have achieved or failed to achieve.

4. Imagine now this gospel not simply proclaimed but embodied in a community. Justified by sheer grace, it seeks to "justify" by grace those declared "unjust" by a society's implacable law of achievement. Imagine, furthermore, this community determined to infuse the wider culture, along with its political and economic institutions, with the message that it seeks to embody and proclaim. This is justification by grace, proclaimed and practiced. A dead doctrine? Hardly!

4. **Conclusion:** See the power to go out and work Gospel renewal can only come from having the gospel first change and renew our own lives. When you realize that Jesus saved by sheer grace, that you did nothing to earn or deserve his love.. that you in your own way were like the mourning, ash covered captives of Zion, and Jesus gave you his Life. Then you are equipped to go out and love and serve people the way Jesus loved and served you. There is nothing more powerfully compelling than to look at the needs of someone else and ask - What did Jesus do for my needs? He poured himself out for me..
 1. In what ways can we imitate and display to the people of our city that reversal of fortunes that has taken place in our lives through the work of Jesus Christ? I said last week there might be a thousand things we can't do, but what is one thing we can do?
 1. I pray that we, the body at Refuge Christian Fellowship, would begin to see ourselves this way - this identity with Jesus Christ, in his life, death, resurrection and mission to the world. That we would think, speak, act and live in line with the vision of Isaiah 61.
 2. I challenge you that this week you would get together with your community, your family, roommates and discuss what it looks like to do gospel reversal and renewal work in our city. How can we do this together, how can we do this individually.
 1. And next week we'll come together to close up this series looking at what it means to be Oaks of Righteousness.