**New Hope Sermon the good news of the gospel**

As we continue our series on the power of the gospel, it is imperative that we understand what the gospel, the good news of God’s kingdom, really is about. The answers will come from Jesus’s own words and the Isaiah prophecy He said He came to fulfill.

In this chapter of Isa. 61 “we are introduced once again to the means whereby God’s people will be enabled to live righteous lives…That means is the Anointed One, the Messiah. He will make of the people what they cannot make of themselves…The servant/Messiah’s work will not only deliver but also transform...That deliverance and transformation is expressed in 61:4 in the language of rebuilding and in 61:5 in the language of freedom” (NIV Application Commentary, Isaiah, John Oswalt, pp. 649-650.) That’s a cliff notes summary of the gospel.

In Mt. 4:17 Jesus’ initial message is: “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near* (or at hand). This is a continuation of John the Baptist’s message of the repentance needed to “*prepare the way for the Lord and make straights paths for him*” (Mt. 3:3) John was very specific as he explained what that repentance looked like: ‘Luke 3:11-14:

*If you have two coats, give one away,” he said. “Do the same with your food.”*

*12Tax men also came to be baptized and said, “Teacher, what should we do?”*

*13He told them, “No more extortion—collect only what is required by law.”*

*14Soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”*

*He told them, “No shakedowns, no blackmail—and be content with your rations.”*

Specific acts of justice and godly living. Why? Because the coming Messiah would make a relationship with the holy God possible and that demands cleansing and a new level of righteousness.

This theme of repentance continues to be foundational to encountering the God of the gospel. When Peter preached his first sermon at Pentecost to the thousands of Jews in Jerusalem that holy day, he told the story of Jesus and his crucifixion and resurrection. The people cried out: ‘*What shall we do?” and Peter replied: “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts 2:38).

Repent means to turn around – to turn away from one’s sinful, self-centered living, and turn toward God in faith. Tony Evans gives this driving illustration:

“Repentance is when you are going south on the highway and then recognize you need to be going north. Repentance isn’t just thinking about changing directions. It isn’t just watching other folk go by, wondering if they are going wrong too. Repentance is looking for the nearest exit, getting off, crossing over and getting back on the other road on your way home. It’s turning the other way.

If you are twenty miles out of the way and decide to change directions, you must take the next exit ramp. This is the ramp of confession where you agree that you’ve been going the wrong way. Then you have to cross over the grace overpass where God gives you the opportunity and the privilege to turn around. Confessing get you to the place where you can make that happy u turn. Grace crosses you over.

Now, there is another ramp that you have to take to get back on the highway headed in the right direction. This is the restoration on-ramp. The confession off ramp leads to the grace overpass which carries you over and puts you right in front of the restoration on-ramp so that you can begin heading in the right direction.

Once the turn has been made and repentance has been accomplished you may still be twenty miles out of the way. You might be discouraged because you have gone twenty miles wrong or maybe twenty years wrong. In fact, many folks get stuck here, thinking that since they are already twenty miles out of the way, they might as well keep on heading in that same wrong direction. The thing to remember is that when taking a trip, the ride coming back home always seems shorter than the ride going. There’s something about coming home that shortens the feeling of distance, even when the actual distance to cover is the same.” Tony Evans Illustrations, pp. 246-247.)

Repentance is the beginning of the good news of the gospel.

Secondly, the good news of the gospel starts a new, right relationship with God. The promise is that “*He clothes us with the garments of salvation and arrays us* in a robe of righteousness – His righteousness. No other world religion offers this, beloved. In all the other religions the devotees work with their good deeds to make themselves acceptable to whatever deities they think exist. But God gives us His righteousness – the righteousness of Christ – when we believe in Him. That creates our acceptance or right standing with God.

For some Christians this is the sum total of the gospel – it is their ticket to heaven because now they have been made right with God. But there’s more, much more to the gospel good news.

Our gospel also includes life transformation made possible by the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus quoted The Messianic prophecy in Isa. 61 and said He had come to fulfill that prophecy: *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa.+61%3A1-4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-18845a)*] 2to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,  and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. 4They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.”*

This is the third part of the gospel Jesus proclaims – it isn’t about sin, repentance and God’s righteousness given to us. It is about the restoration, healing work of our “wonderful, merciful Savior, our Counselor, Comforter and Helper.” As I meditated on this ministry of Christ this year, I was struck anew with the caring, restorative and transformative work of salvation. This really is good news for people who are in poverty literally or figuratively, who find their heart in pieces and need to be bound back up, who are trapped in the darkness of their own ego and sin and need to see God’s light in their darkness, and who are chained to their own destructive oppressed lifestyles and need their chains to be cut loose. Jesus the Messiah has come to do just that. He alone gives life out of death, beauty out of ashes, joy instead of mourning and praise instead of a spirit of despair or oppression. He is the transforming liberating Savior and Lord – the One we all need.

What’s also such good news is that this transforming work continues into one’s Christian life.

This week I have been in great need of Jesus’s rest to the soul-weary. Caregiving in Alzheimers is very wearing and I cried out to Jesus for His soul-rest and restored joy in my life. I also asked my kids and two prayer partners to pray for this on Sat. and realized that I had a spirit of heaviness pressing me down. I claimed the Lord’s deliverance and word from Isa. 61:3 that *He will give a mantle of praise instaead of the spirit of heaviness* and am so grateful in the past 2 days that some of that heaviness has lifted. I know many others who need this as well. Do you know people who have that sense of heaviness or oppression? They need our prayer support and the word of the Lord that He came to lift these burdens off His people. This is part of the good news of the gospel.

In addition, Jesus gives hope to the brokenhearted, freedom to those caught in sin patterns they can’t seem to break, and a family of faith to walk with. It makes all the difference when we can walk together and support and pray and care for each other. God does give beauty in exchange for ashes, the oil of joy in place of mourning. In fact, I found this quote from Elizabeth Eliot that speaks directly to this issue. She said, “Of one thing I am perfectly sure: God’s story never ends with ashes.” This was her testimony after her husband and his 4 other missionary colleagues were speared to death in Ecuador by the Auca Indians – the very tribe Jim and colleagues were trying to reach with the gospel. God gives beauty for ashes. The missionaries’ deaths w34re like ashes. Vibrant lives cut short. Families with little ones bereft of their fathers and husbands. But God has turned that story among the Aucas to His great glory as over time many of those very ones who speared the missionaries to death have come to faith in Jesus Christ and the whole ethos of that tribe has changed. “God’s story never ends in ashes.” That part of the gospel is so needed in our broken secular world.

Part of the good news is this salvific work of rebuilding, and restoring people to the wholeness and life in Christ He died to make possible. Freedom for the prisoners, release for the oppressed, recovery of sight for the blind, beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the spirit of despair. There is joy in Jesus’ message of the Kingdom! This is the good news we proclaim.

And we proclaim it, not only verbally with our words, but in our lifestyles in a ministry of care and outreach.

Consider this story told at Lausanne in 2017 by Shoichi Konda:

“The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011[[1]](https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-07/christian-witness-amidst-disaster-japan?utm_source=Lausanne+Movement+List&utm_campaign=b4a9f5ab7e-RSS_Best_of&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_602c1cb67d-b4a9f5ab7e-91729101#post-109553-endnote-1) prompted Japanese churches to rethink how they engage in evangelism and church development. In the Tohoku area of northern Japan, there are many examples of people who previously had shown no interest in the gospel, but became receptive following their 2011 disaster experience. This openness came about through neither a major evangelistic campaign nor an attractive church program. Rather, people were drawn to Christianity as they saw Christ in the lives of Christian volunteers who, without demanding anything in return, kept coming to the disaster areas to provide aid and support.

Immediately following the 2011 disaster, a great number of local and overseas volunteers came to the tsunami-ravaged Tohoku seacoast. However, a few months later—when evacuation centers began to close, water and food distribution became unnecessary, and the work of removing tsunami mud from houses largely came to an end—most volunteers and support organizations stopped coming; but not Christian volunteers.

Christians were aware that those suffering were dealing not just with physical needs. They worked through local churches and continued to support people affected by the disaster, even after people had moved from evacuation centers into temporary housing. Christians were aware that those suffering were dealing not just with physical needs such as clothing, food, and housing—they were also dealing with spiritual needs, as they wrestled with the loss of loved ones and possessions that had been dear to them.

As they asked themselves why such a disaster had fallen upon them, pastors and Christian volunteers found themselves engaged in ‘presence ministry’ as they tirelessly listened to victims repeat their stories of grief, anxiety, and regret. Even today, six years since the earthquake and tsunami, many pastors, both men and women, continue to visit elderly people in the Tohoku region who are lonely and stuck in temporary housing. Pastors share cups of tea, engage in conversation, and offer spiritual support.

Now that most of the volunteers are gone, people in the disaster areas often voice their concern that the rest of the world might forget about them, even though the work of restoration is a long way from completion. As Christians keep visiting the people affected by the disaster, they have come to be called Kirisuto-san or ‘Mr./Ms. Christ’, with respect and appreciation. This is reminiscent of what happened in the first century. People first used the term Christian in scorn for Christ-followers, but later came to use it with respect and affection. So it is 20 centuries later in northern Japan as people see Christ in the lives of Christians.

The message of reconciliation and the ministry of reconciliation are equal parts of the good news of the gospel.

Finally, there is still another aspect of this gospel that we see in comparing our two texts in Isa. 61 and Luke 4: People’s choice about a relationship with God has eternal consequences. **(pp)** Notice in the Isaiah text in v. 2 that the Messiah would “*proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God.*” When Jesus said He fulfilled this Messianic prophecy, he stopped with “*proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* A note in my reference Bible on the Luke 4 passage said: “A comparison with the passage quoted Isa. 61:1-2, affords an instance of the exquisite accuracy of the Lord’s use of Scripture. Jesus stopped at “the year of the Lord’s favor,” which is connected with the first advent and His gracious offer of Himself,…whereas “*the day of vengeance of our God”* belongs to the second advent when He comes again in judgment.”

That day of judgement tells us that it matters whether or not people respond to Christ’s offer of life. If they do not, none of the promises of the Messiah’s transformation, restoration and rebuilding are possible for that individual. Plus, they will face God’s judgment for their rejection of Him. So how does this affect how we live in this present “year of the Lord’s favor? It means we are urging people to choose Christ.

Jesus said:

*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A+14-19&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-26135a" \o "See footnote a)] 15that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A+14-19&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26136b)*] 16For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil*.

The problem with the human heart is that “*people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil*.”Jn.3:19

Combing this problem of people’s sin with God’s judgement should rearrange our priorities. As the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians believers: “*Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that’s what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions. Sooner or later we’ll all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ and take what’s coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad. 11-14That keeps us vigilant, you can be sure. It’s no light thing to know that we’ll all one day stand in that place of Judgment. That’s why we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God. (The Message)*

Paul goes on to say: *The love of Christ compels us…He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again…God has given us the ministry of reconciliation…and committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

****

*We are therefore ambassadors of Christ* “*and implore others on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God*.” (2 Cor.5:14-20). This understanding of the urgency of evangelism springs out of God’s heart - “God makes his appeal through us.”2 Cor. 5;20):Be reconciled to God…*we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God.”* This is still the “year of our Lord’s favor.” God doesn’t want any to perish; He wants everyone to repent and believe and He puts the urgency of that choice on our hearts so it affects how we relate to every Christian and non-believer we meet. We are here to help people meet God and come to the salvation that He makes available.

There are countless conversion stories of how people come to Christ. Every month *Christianity Today* features one of these stories on its back pages. Here’s a shortened version of the story from the February issue. It is a story set in Iran in 1979. David Nasser starts off:

“I was nine years old when I decided that I hated God. I hated him because I believed he hated me first. It was 1979, during the middle of the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeni and his religious zealots had recently overthrown the existing government and seized political power. [Unfortunately], my father was a military officer in the precious regime and a death threat was now over his head, and the head of his family. At school I was called outside for an unexpected assembly, a soldier read off three names, mind included and called us to the front. Removing a gun from his holster, he quoted from the Qur’an and told me he would kill me to deliver a message to supporters of the old regime. Fortunately, the school principal intervened and the soldier relented.”

But this meant David Nasser’s family all had to flee Iran and seek asylum in another country. As David says, “we were leaving our home, our family, our wealth, our friends – everything we held dear – all because our country had been victimized by religion gone wrong.”

The Nasser family ended up in America and “settled in Texas because my father had done some previous training at Fort Hood. But “living in a military town in a patriotic state, it didn’t take long to figure out that I wasn’t welcome. I was constantly bullied, joked about, picked on, harassed and laughed at. Everywhere we went we were outcasts – weirdos who couldn’t acclimate.”

Why and how did David become a Christian in this context? Because Christians in his high school reached out as friends, invited him to church, and to their Bible study, and explained the gospel to him. However, David was a Muslim, so in defiance, he took the Bible they had given him and prepared to set it on fire on the backyard grill. But he couldn’t find any matches. So he started reading it. It was Jesus himself who came alive to him. But his father disowned him and soon he was homeless. Again, the Christians took him in and began to help him experience the Christian life in Community. Over time each of the family members have also come to Christ. Christianity Today (Jan/Feb. 2019, I escaped from Iran but not from God, David Nasser, pp. 104, 103.) He ends his story with: “God in his amazing grace, has turned my family’s tragedy into testimony. Though I hated him as a child, I can see now that he was holding us all along.”

That’s gospel good news of Amazing Grace. Even when we “hate God”, He can turn us around and make us new creations of God in Christ. We go from death to life as we know and receive God’s amazing love and salvation. Then as Christ’s love fills us, He will thrust us out to urgently implore others to be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:14-20). Our chains are gone and we can be delivered from self so we live for God and for others. We can become God’s partners for His eternal purposes in our world today. Hallelujah.

That’s the good news of the gospel. Let us pray. Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 2 10 19

Song of Response: Amazing Grace/My chains are gone.

My chains are gone, I’ve been set free.

My God, My Savior has ransomed me,

And like a flood His mercy reigns.

Unending love, amazing grace.”