

Is 61: For the City

Good morning Harvest...

My name is Doug Rowland and I serve here as the Pastor of Outreach Ministries – I want to add my welcome to those of you who are with us for the first time – so glad you're here

Welcome to week 2 of our Outreach Conference; yesterday was an amazing day watching several hundred of our people "Serve the City" – served 600 ppl at Mobile in Moline; over 25,000 meals for Dav Sch; siding 2 Habitat homes; massive park cleanup and kickball game in RI

Love watching our people respond to God's call to GO: whether that's across the street, across the river or across the globe

So encouraged by stories like Bryce and Nealie Hill who respond in obedience and how GOD satisfies their heart for the nations by having them live right here in our city amidst refugees

Excited to be with you and privileged to preach God's Word to us

We are going to be in Isaiah 61... raise your hands if you need a copy of God's Word and our ushers will get one into your hands... I'll meet you there in just a minute

I want to ask us the question: "Why did Jesus come to earth?"

If you and I had an opportunity to talk about this – what would you say?

Maybe, as one of your pastors, you would give me a few "Sunday-school" answers

But, I want to encourage you to take some time to think about Jesus' mission

Was it simply to save us from our sin and the consequences of Hell, so we can go to Heaven?

Was it just to repair the relationship between God and humanity?

Perhaps the best place we can find the answer to this question about Jesus' mission would be Jesus' own words – in fact that's why we are in Is. 61 today – they were some of Jesus' 1st words

Jesus began his public ministry one Sabbath day in a synagogue in his hometown, Nazareth

The Jewish crowd would have been longing for God to send the promised Messiah

– who would restore the kingdom to Israel and reign on David's throne forever

But centuries had gone by with no Messiah...

Hope was probably in short supply

It is in this context that Jesus stood up and was handed a scroll from the prophet Isaiah

Unrolling the scroll, Jesus found the place that we now know as Is 61, where it was written:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor;

He has 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 favor and the day of vengeance of our God;

To comfort all who mourn; to grant 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
All eyes were fastened on Him and He began by saying to them:
"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Remember these are some of Jesus' first recorded words – He uses Is. 61 to announce His mission
A mission our cities desperately need to see lived out

Let's pray and then jump in...

In a month-long conference, where our emphasis is GO, GO, GO

Verse 1 should cause us to pause...

"The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me..."

Isaiah's words remind us that the Messiah did nothing in his own strength

And as follower of His, we shouldn't either

Before we get to all the "doing," this is our reminder

In His power and not our own...

This condition applies to everything that follows AND
Jesus reminds us of it time and time again

Before ascending, he makes comments like:

"You will receive power when the HS has come upon you and you will be my witnesses..." in Acts 1:8

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever... teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said" in John 14

Or reminding his disciples, after telling them to go into all the earth and make disciples... "Behold I am with you to the end of the age..." in Mt. 28

We were never meant to do what He's asked in our own strength... He is with us and has offered His Spirit

Most often, this is hard for us to grasp, isn't it?

We like to get to work and get things done – we like to make a plan and work the plan

If you step out into our city in your own strength – you'll wear thin and burn out

The needs are great, the opportunities are compelling and the stories are heart-breaking

You don't have what it takes... I don't have what it takes

The point: you cannot DO anything of lasting impact on mission in your own strength

My hope is that you are able to breathe a sigh of relief – He will do it in you and through you
He is faithful to complete the good work He has started in you – if you are a believer, you have the

same Spirit to lead, guide, and strengthen you along the way

Your strength has significant limits – His does not

That said, while we do depend on him for strength and leadership, we don't expect Him to DO the work for us

Isaiah lays out for us a series of things the Messiah does and we are to do in His power and by His Spirit

In His power, and not our own, we are to, first:

Go to the people (v. 1)

You see it there in the middle of verse 1 – Jesus was anointed “to BRING good news to the poor...”

Bring implies – We are not given the freedom to sit back and wait for “them” to come to “us”

We must go – whether to the materially poor or more generally to those who are distressed and in trouble for any reason – the “poor” more broadly

Just as Jesus did for us by becoming flesh and dwelling among us (Jn 1:14)

Showing us that love is real and it can be costly

The world doesn’t need more words, it needs more words made flesh

More people to live the good news incarnationally – in a way that can be seen, heard and handled

The world needs more people to go where the people are, gather where they gather; go on their turf BEFORE we expect them to come on ours

Over the past 2 years, God has really been shaping this conviction in my wife and I that we need to GO to the people

In fact, it started when I preached from Nehemiah 2 years ago at our last Outreach Conference – that I was convicted by my functional indifference towards the plight of our city and that some in our church were called to move – to neighbor the hurting parts of our city

This thought began to haunt us: **we need to be careful that we don’t live in such a way that our Christian life costs us nothing**

We all struggle with that, don’t we?

I don’t know about you – but I fall so easily back into comfortable Christianity – in essence, becoming a clone of cultural Christianity and losing my counter-cultural identity as a disciple of Jesus

In God’s grace, He has given us an amazing small group to walk this journey with us Bryce and Nealie, from that God at Work video are in our group along with 4 or 5 more couples who all have a heart for West Rock Island

Some have been there for their entire lives, some for a few years, and others who have recently sold homes to relocate -- all for the purpose of:

GOING TO THE PEOPLE

Quite frankly, our group is still waiting for Kristin and I – we are about 4-6 weeks out as our foreclosure is getting renovated

Our intention is to listen to the neighborhood – find where God is at work, listen to what He says and GO where He leads

We don’t really know what’s next – only that He has called us to GO

Here’s the thing: whether you relocate or not

The question is are you going?

As in, are you intentionally living on mission to reach the people God has placed around you in our city?

It takes work to be significantly engaged with unbelievers

It’s hard to even find time for it – it’s hard as a pastor – I get it

I am around you guys all the time ☺ – and I get it, we make it difficult for you sometimes with the every-evening opportunities we offer

BUT, we must be careful that we don’t lose how to love the lost

Recognize that the more time we spend with Christians, we can become ignorant in relating to the world around us

Perhaps recognize the tendency in ourselves to hunker down and retreat from the world rather than step out to engage in the fight

We are called to be “in” the world – to Go to the people

I trust that God will give you wisdom as to what that means for where you live, how you spend your time, your money, steward your things...etc...

Isaiah’s words about the Messiah’s mission – He **brought** Good News **to** the people

What that means for us: Don’t stay put, Don’t sit back, Don’t be still, Don’t get complacent... GO

Go to the people and...

Proclaim good news (v. 1b-2)

I’ve got to be honest, seeing the word “proclaim,” repeated throughout this passage got me a little nervous

I thought about choosing another passage – thinking to myself – I’ve got to have something more to say to the people than... say this, say this and say this

I had this thought too - if all the Messiah did was proclaim, then all we need is a silver-bullet

Gospel presentation and the mission is accomplished

Then I started to study, and what I knew to be true in my heart was verified in the Scriptures that His mission is far **more than the words** that we speak

The Messiah, the one Isaiah describes here, who we know to be Jesus – doesn’t simply hurl words at the poor – He wasn’t just a Messenger; He was a Model

“Proclaiming Good News” does not mean regurgitating a memorized 3-point outline about God, Sin and a Savior

It’s as much about **proclaiming** rightly-chosen words as it is **demonstrating** good news with a lifestyle gripped by the Gospel

Look how Isaiah describes the mission of the Messiah, the same words recorded in Luke that Jesus says of Himself

He was sent to:

- Bring good news to the poor – everything that follows explains what good news means...
- To bind up the broken-hearted
- To Proclaim liberty to the captives and Freedom to those bound
- To Encourage the weary that He is near and that justice will be served and
- To Bring Comfort to all those who mourn

Jesus’ mission:

- he was a preacher whose words did not fall like a hail shower but refreshed like the rain
- he was a physician who tenderly and skillfully bandaged the deep wounds of the heart
- he was a liberator who announced “Freedom” to those bound up in various vices
- he was a herald of greater days ahead – of His return and coming justice
- he was the great comforter to those fainting with the heaviness of despair

If that was His mission, what does that mean for our ministry? For us? For our city?

I want to talk with you for a minute about **contextualization**

The word contextualization basically means to consider the context – the setting and the culture – into which you are communicating your message and, if necessary, adjust your message (without changing it) so that those to whom you are speaking are more likely to hear and accurately understand what you are saying to them.

IOW, how we communicate Good News to one group of people might not be received as Good News to another group of people

We are not talking about changing the content of the Good News, only the way we communicate the unchanging content of the Good News
So that our audience (broken, captive, mourning) HEARS Good News

The question is: do we know where the people of our city ache?

Do we know what good news sounds like to them?

That's why we start by going to the people – to understand where they hurt, what hope looks like to them, the sins that hold them captive...

How would good news sound different to a fatherless child as opposed to a single mom?

How would good news sound different to an inmate as opposed to an addict?

The Messiah's mission to all of them: proclaim good news... tell them!

To the fatherless – Good News might sound like "God sets the lonely in families"

To the single mom – God gathers your tears and will provide strength in your weakness

To the inmate—anyone in Christ is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come

To the addict – There is freedom from chains and an out from the endless cycle

Just this past year, I was with some of the teens at Youth Hope for a poetry practice in our hour together, it came to our attention that one of their friends had been shot and killed only blocks away from the building

One of the guys yelled at the top of his lungs, fists-clenched to the sky – "WHY? WHEN WILL THIS STOP? KIDS ARE SHOOTING KIDS...IT AIN'T RIGHT"

I had never been with those mourning the loss of friends from gunfire... what's good news sound like in that moment?

Another practice, a 13-year old girl shows up with a battered/ bruised face from her bi-polar mother...what do you say? What's good news to her?

17 year old – both parents in jail and taking care of his grandparents while trying to work and go to school – needs to fill out college applications, but has no idea where to start...

How will they know – Roman 10 says – if they haven't heard

So we need to tell them – Go to the people – proclaim good news

And don't just tell them, show them

In His power and not our own,

Offer New Life

Isaiah gives us three different images in verse 3 here to make one point: Jesus offers NEW LIFE

He says the Messiah **gives** the people...

- a beautiful headdress **instead** of ashes
- the oil of gladness **instead** of mourning
- the garment of praise **instead** of a faint spirit

I think often in our attempts to "offer new life" we short-sell the Gospel

I think sometimes, in our minds we view the Gospel as just a simple upgrade – like somehow it's good we share because people embracing the Gospel is better than what they currently have

This isn't like getting a first-class upgrade from your coach seat

Or a Ferrari in exchange for your rusted out lemon

We are talking about God's best in exchange for our worst

His Son for Our Sin

We don't just offer people a **good** life – we offer them a **new** life

Jesus, in Ch. Spurgeon's words, promises he will come and reveal joy to the sorrowing soul

The eyes that were once dull and cloudy shall sparkle again – and the countenance of those

mourning shall once more be radiant with beauty.

Have you ever seen someone who physically seems to change when they come to know Christ?

Their load seems lighter; their face seems brighter; their tone seems happier; their chin up

It's one of the reasons I love baptisms around our church – some of the faces we see coming out of the water are unforgettable

It is clear their lives have changed

If you notice in the passage, it's as if the Messiah **places** the headdress, the oil and the garment of praise on the people Himself

Offering "new life" is a hands-on deal, it was for Jesus and it is for us

We don't just tell people "new life" is available – we offer them a foretaste of what new life is like

To the fatherless – be a father to them – help with homework, play catch, foster parent, adopt... let them catch a glimpse of NEW LIFE with a Dad

To the single mom – help out practically, mentor kids, bring her into your family, let her taste NEW LIFE that she doesn't have to do on her own

To the inmate – visit them and share from God's Word – let them know they are not forgotten and can be forgiven – the past doesn't define them – Jesus wipes away the old and ushers in NEW LIFE

To the addict – offer freedom from the endless cycle, get them around others who have experienced NEW LIFE so they too can have hope

That might sound a bit overwhelming

Remember it's in His power, and not our own

Do for one, what you wish you could do for them all

Start with one...

A hurting neighbor, a co-worker going through divorce, a latchkey kid down the street, or volunteer with one of our partners

As each of us offer new life to one, we begin to change the landscape of our city – one person, one street, one block at a time

We begin to...

Rebuild the City (one life at a time)

Look at the result of going to the people, proclaiming good news and offering new life

v. 3b...“that they [poor; broken-hearted...] may be called **oaks** of righteousness, the planting of the **LORD**, 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.”

That's what we're aiming for –

People, once like saplings – blowing in the winds of culture, snapping from the storms of life, leaves withered and branches dying are now oaks

Stable, strong, firmly-rooted and lush with life

Crumbling lives are now – as our ministry year themes says – “built to last”

Changed lives that make the world remark: “It is God's work, it is a tree God planted, it could not grow like that if anyone else had planted it – this man is a man of God's making...”

Broken people create broken cities and even broken systems that keep people bound in brokenness

But, rebuilt people, of God's making, are the ones He uses to rebuild the city

One of the funny things about our charity is that we don't typically evaluate its outcomes

Kids are hungry – we feed them

People are cold – we get them clothes and shelter

Someone needs money – we write a check

There are no Christmas presents under the tree – so we wrap and deliver them

It feels good and it seems right

But, the Scriptures don't allow us the comfortable distance of writing a check

That's not how the city is rebuilt

That's not to say that financial resources aren't one-piece of the puzzle – but we cannot appease our consciences in thinking that that is all the LORD requires of us

A few years back we had a “successful” volunteer-run clothing ministry in Davenport

We had probably 100 volunteers and served several hundred guests each weekend by giving away bags and bags of donated clothing

By outward appearances – we were caring well for our city

Until I got a call from the Davenport PD – Doug, do you know you are creating a black market for the clothes you are giving away on Saturdays? Fights break out all the time... the streets are littered with clothing... the clothes are being sold for drugs... and on and on

Over the 2 years or so we went from gratitude from our guests –

To building anticipation – they would ask “will I get it again next week?”

To building expectation – when do I get it again?

To building entitlement – why don't you have my size or the color I like?

To finally building dependency

That's the danger of one-way giving

Dependent people are not the picture we see here in Isaiah

We see people's lives who have been radically changed by the Gospel who are now standing firm on their own two feet – breaking the chains of generational sin and rebuilding broken cities
In order to see that happen – rebuilt people rebuilding the city, we need to make commitments to each other like:

- I will never do for others what they have or could have the capacity to do for themselves
OR
- I will take time to listen and learn so that my actions will strengthen rather than weaken those whom I serve

It's more difficult for sure – more expensive, more uncomfortable, more inconvenient, more time-consuming

BUT, it's what Christ came to do - and it's what He did the first time He was here ⁷ and it's what He will complete when He comes again when every tear will be wiped from our eyes

In the meantime, we live out His mission -- we wipe crying eyes, bring good news to the poor, bind-up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to those in bondage, tell the streets that the LORD is coming again and to receive the new life He offers

As Paul said in 1 Cor: 9 – we become all things to all people that by any means we might save some

In order to see them flourish – not so they look more like us, but so they look more like Him

Not so they are dependent upon us, but that they are dependent upon Him

So the world has no question – they are an oak, planted by the LORD Himself

Here's the thing – all Hell is breaking loose on the streets of our city

What are we going to do? What are you going to do?

We have a choice to make:

Will we be a church in the city – here only by location, relying on the city to come to us

Will we be a church against the city: adopting an “us v. them” posture to fight the decaying culture

Will be a church of the city?: losing our saltiness and brightness by looking like the world around us

OR

Will be a church FOR the city?: proclaiming the truths of God's Word with passion, clarity and boldness while seeking to see the city prosper?

This world has never been heaven – nor was it ever intended to be, and sometimes our cities can be the most clear illustration of that

We don't have the option to curl up in the fetal position

We need to decide to live like strangers from another land

And stop trying to live as if we belong HERE when we are citizens of heaven – THE rebuilt city

Let's let Jesus' mission be our marching orders – our cities need more words made flesh

Go to the people

Proclaim good news

Offer new life and

Rebuild the city – one life at a time

Let's pray