

Isaiah 61: The LORD is Gracious
Michael Hinnen – July 5, 2026

DT: The LORD loves to give good gifts to His people.
FQ: What gifts does the LORD give?

Main Points: He gives freedom to the enslaved (v. 1-3), purpose to the ruined (v. 4-7), & righteousness to the underserving (v. 8-11).

AW Tozer once said, "What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. When you think about God, what comes into your mind? What picture do you see?"

For our daughter Lily, one of the pictures that comes into her mind when she thinks about her grandparents is that they LOVE getting her gifts. This is true for both sides, Mommers & Poppers, & Mi-Maw & Pi-Paw. Lately, Lily's favorite thing to do is jump on our neighbor's trampoline. So, we just hop the fence, go over there, and she jumps for a long time (and a lot of times I'll jump with her). But a couple weeks ago, we had a BAD storm in the Joplin area, and their trampoline ended up three houses down and was absolutely crumpled. Lily's favorite thing to do now, gone... But thankfully, Mi-Maw & Pi-Paw came to the rescue. My mom and dad were already planning on getting Lily a trampoline, and we got the box delivered this week... so I wanted to show this video of when Lily found out she got a new trampoline.

(show video)

I don't know how that doesn't make you smile! My parents love giving gifts... How much more so our loving God, who showers us with gifts. In fact, James chapter 1 says that every good and perfect gift comes from above. Jesus says, **Matthew 7:11 (NIV) — 11** "[if evil parents] know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" One of the pictures the Bible wants us to see is that **DT: The LORD loves to give good gifts to His people.** He loves abundantly blessing his people. And the word in the Bible we use for giving gifts that people don't deserve: Grace. The LORD is gracious.

Today, Isaiah 61 is going to help us see a proper vision of who God is & how he is Gracious. We are continuing our series through the book of Isaiah, looking at God's character. And in our section of Isaiah (40-66), Isaiah is talking to a people who will be in exile. These are the people who will be taken from their homes, they will be deported to a foreign land, their place of worship (the Temple) will be destroyed, and everything they know will be flipped upside down. The people are questioning God: where are you? Do you still love us? Do you still have a plan for us? Have you forgotten about us? Maybe you've been there before....

But God answers those questions by showing them a picture of his restoration project & the good gifts he is going to shower on them... through his Spirit-empowered servant. Look with me at Isa. 61.

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV) — 1 The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me...

Who is talking here? This sounds like the Messiah figure of Isa. 11, the one who is empowered by the Spirit and will bring about God's Kingdom. But this also sounds like the Servant, the one we've been told about in Isa. 42, 49, and 50, & 53, the one who will accomplish God's will through his death. The person in Isaiah 61 is merging the identity of both God's Servant & the Messiah.

The Bible tells us exactly who this person is: it is Jesus. Jesus actually begins his ministry by quoting this Scripture to say that it is him!

Luke 4:16–21 (NIV) — 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me ... 21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus wants us to know that he is the Servant & Messiah that Isaiah 61 predicts. He is the Spirit empowered Servant who will accomplish God's will & bring about God's good gifts. But what gifts will he bring about for his people?

1. He gives freedom to the enslaved (v. 1-3).

Isaiah 61:1–3 (NIV) — 1 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, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn 3 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.”

The Spirit empowered servant will do 7 things: to proclaim, to proclaim, to proclaim, to bind up, to comfort, to provide, and to bestow.

The Servant keeps speaking! He speaks good news to the poor. This isn't just the material poor we are talking about but those who are poor in spirit as well. These are the hurting, the downtrodden, those who feel alone & destitute. They are those in deep trouble, sin, brokenness, and addiction. The Spirit speaks good news to them.

He will also speak freedom for the captives. For many of those who would have heard this, remember they are in exile. They aren't celebrating 250 years of their country's founding... no, they have been taken away from their homes and some of them have been imprisoned. Even if they have not been physically imprisoned, they feel that way spiritually; they feel in bondage.

The Spirit empowered servant will also speak about the year of the LORD's favor. This is talking about the Day of Jubilee (in Lev. 25), where every 50 years all debts in land of Israel are forgiven & the land is restored to their original owners. & what is interesting is that when Jesus quotes this passage, he stops the quote! He says it will be a day of Jubilee, but he leaves out that it is a day of judgement... Why? because when he came the first time, he brought salvation... but when he returns (& we see this in Isa. 63) then he will bring vengeance. But this first day is meant to be a day of joy.

The servant does a lot of talking here... and we are used to that, people saying they are going to do something, but then do nothing... But the servant doesn't just preach, he acts! The servant takes action; he binds up the broken-hearted, like a mother who gently cares for her kid's wounds and puts Neosporin & a bandage on it.

And he comforts those who mourn & grieve. He takes their sackcloth & ashes (which is symbolic for their mourning) and replaces them with a crown of beauty. These people are transformed from rags to riches, from people who are crushed into people who are celebrating! And vs. 3 says they are now trees! Oaks of righteousness!

The main idea here is that those who were once enslaved have been set free!

But Jesus is the only one who can bring true freedom. And what happens to each & every one of us is that we try and find freedom through the world... but without Jesus, it always leads to more chains. It always leads to slavery. Have you ever felt enslaved before?

I never realized how relevant the story of **Pinocchio** is for our lives until I watched it again with my daughters. Pinocchio, a wooden boy, as you probably know, was created by Geppetto. And what Pinocchio desires more than anything else is to be a real boy! But he is told by a fox, to be a real boy you must be... famous. So, he joins a theatrical production, where he dances, and sings, & everybody loves him! But at the end of the program, his owner throws him into a cage. He's famous... but it leads to his enslavement.

Then, a fairy releases him, and he gets another chance! But... he falls into a new temptation, called Pleasure Island. At Pleasure Island, you can have whatever you want! Pursue whatever you desire and then you will feel truly free... but what happens at Pleasure Island is everyone becomes less than human – they become donkeys. And Pinocchio is once again enslaved, this time by chasing his pleasure.

This is the world we live in... Where we chase after popularity, or pleasure, or possessions, or power, or performance, expecting them to provide us with freedom! But as we chase these things, they lead us into

even more bondage. They ultimately lead to sin & death. Do you feel enslaved?

If you do, there is good news. Jesus has come for you. Blessed are the poor... blessed are those who mourn... blessed are the meek... for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus has come to give freedom to the enslaved. In fact, the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 5.1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free!" He wants you to experience true freedom, & he has already accomplished your freedom through his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection... and he wants to give you as gift... nothing you can achieve on your own but can only be received by trusting in him. He wants to give you the gift of freedom. Will you receive this gift?

But Jesus doesn't just free us FROM something, he frees us FOR something.

2. He gives purpose to the ruined (v. 4-7)

Isaiah 61:4–7 (NIV) — 4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. 5 Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. 6 And you will be called priests of the Lord; you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. 7 Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so, you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours."

After Babylon came into Jerusalem in 586 BC and exiled the people, they left the land in ruin. They destroyed the city walls (so no protection), they burned the king's palace (so no king) and looted & burned the Temple (so no God) (see 2 Kgs. 25). Everything was taken away from them. The people & the land were left in ruin. They had no identity...

But v. 4-7 shows us another reversal. Just as the people were transformed from rags to riches in v. 1-3, now their city is transformed too! The Spirit-empowered servant helps the people rebuild and restore and renew the ruined city! And what's fascinating is that the nations that were once oppressing them are now serving them!

But I want to hone in on v. 6. The people are “called priests of the Lord... ministers of God.” The people who were enslaved a couple verses ago are now free & acting as the priests and ministers of God. Those who were left with no identity have a purpose as God’s priests.

This is somewhat ironic because all the way back in Exod. 19, the LORD enters into a special relationship with these people & calls them his Kingdom of priests. A priest is someone who is supposed to represent God to the people around them. But you probably know the story... they failed to reflect God’s light and instead fell into the darkness of the surrounding nations... But here, God is regifting them the opportunity to be his priests again! Those who have already failed in God’s commission are given a second chance to represent him well in everything they do. Those who were in ruin, have been given purpose.

In the 50s and 60s, the US was lagging behind the Soviet Union in the space race (some of you may remember this). So, in 1961, President JFK declared that it was the US’s mission to safely put a man on the moon & return him home. It seemed audacious, but the US rallied around this mission. & one story goes that in 1962; JFK was touring a NASA facility. And while walking around, he noticed a janitor carrying a broom. He asked the man, “What do you do here?” and the janitor responded, “I’m helping put a man on the moon.”

The janitor recognized that even in the small things, like sweeping a NASA facility, he had a role to play in something bigger. He had a purpose.

Friends, have you ever wondered what your purpose is? Sometimes we complicate it and want to know exactly what God wants us to do 5, 10, 50 years down the road... But our purpose, right here and right now, is to represent God well. Our purpose is to be his priests, to be his ambassadors, to be his representatives in everything we do! Whether we are changing diapers or changing oil; whether we are teaching a Bible class or a history class; whether we are retired & or just getting our career started... our purpose is to be his priests and do everything for his honor & glory! What is your purpose? It is to be his priest!

He wants to give you the gift of purpose. Will you receive this gift?

But here's the problem... even though he has freed us and given us purpose, we still have an obstacle... our sin. How can we ever stand before the holy God of the universe?

3. He gives righteousness to the underserving (v. 8-11).

Isaiah 61:8–11 (NIV) — 8 “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”

How can we trust that the LORD will pour out these good gifts? Because of his character. He is faithful God, who loves faithfulness & justice. And though his people do NOT deserve his love and rewards, he gives them freely. He enters an eternal covenant with them & blesses them.

And naturally, their blessing results in rejoicing. There's a debate here on whether or not the people of God now rejoicing or if these are the words of the Spirit-empowered servant (in v. 1-3). I actually think it's the people, but either way, I don't think it matters because *what happens to the Servant happens to his people!*

10 I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”

Here, the LORD's people are given the clothes that the LORD himself wears in Isa. 59.16-17, garments of salvation & a robe of righteousness. They are clothed for a wedding & placed in a Garden where righteousness sprouts and is brought forth.

The key word for us is the word *righteousness* (which is used 2x here). It has a two-fold meaning, to be in right relationship with God & also

to live out right relationships with God & others... and all of Isaiah shows us that the people are NOT righteous. The people have trusted in idols, & trusted in political alliances, & in their own works, and as a result they are unrighteous & deserve judgement! Isaiah 64.6 says, ***“6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”***

That is the story of our lives. We deserve nothing but death. Our sin leads to slavery & ruin. And yet, Jesus, in his grace, gives us HIS righteousness. And the good news of the gospel is that at the cross, Jesus was beaten, mocked, and abused, and stripped of his royal clothes, so that you and I could be clothed with his righteousness. Paul says it this way, ***2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) — 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”***

Yes, we are undeserving, but Christ in his love and grace, clothes us with HIS righteousness. **(PAUSE)** He replaces our filthy rags with new clothes... so that we can be prepared for our wedding day.

Our family came back this week for the wedding of Nic and Lainey. Here's a picture of them. (show pic) It was a great day on Friday! And what I want you to notice from the pictures is that nobody showed up in filthy rags. Lainey didn't have mud & dirt all over her dress. No, everybody wore their best because this is a celebration! Jesus won't let his bride come to him wearing dirty. He's going to make sure we have our best clothes on. ***Revelation 19:7–8 (NIV) — 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)*** Jesus preps us for this wedding day by giving us his righteousness, which gives us right standing with God now and helps us to live righteously. He clothes us with his righteousness, so that on the wedding day we are prepared & look good for our groom.

He wants to give you the gift of righteousness. Will you receive this gift?

At the beginning of the sermon I told you this AW Tozer quote: "What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing

about you." So, what picture comes into your mind when you think about God?

When Lily got the trampoline, she didn't earn it... or negotiate for it... or promise to pay my parents back... No, she just received it with joy. It was a gift. It was grace. Our heavenly Father is a gracious God. & He loves to give good gifts to His children through his Son, Jesus. He wants to shower you with freedom, and purpose, and righteousness. The question is not whether or not God is a gracious God. Isaiah 61 has answered that! The question is whether or not will you receive His gifts? Will you receive Jesus?

EXTRA NOTES

- A couple of weeks ago, Lily and I unintentionally wore the same clothes. Here is a picture from that day when we wore our same NYR shirt (show pic). It was so sweet, so fun, so Jonelle had to take a picture of it! Shout out to NYR that's coming up in a couple weeks.

But here's what I want us to see: what we did unintentionally, Christ does intentionally. He sees us in our brokenness. He sees us in our baggage. He sees us with our filthy rags on & though we are undeserving, he still chooses to clothe us with his righteousness. What was once covered in sin, & shame, & death, is now covered with His righteousness.

Why would he willingly choose to clothe us? Because he loves us & is gracious to us.

I don't know where you are at with the LORD this morning, I don't know what picture of God you have in mind, but if you don't see God as a generous, gracious God, then you are not picturing the God of the Bible... and I want to encourage you to begin seeing Him differently. Let's pray.

When he returns, he's going to be in a robe of white, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and yet we are told that we will be clothed like him. We will also have robes of white, not because of anything we've done to deserve it, but because he has given it to us freely, because he is a gracious, kind, generous God.

It was the first time that we wore the same clothes. Listen to me, you and I. We don't deserve to wear the same clothes as Jesus! He is the Holy, Righteous One who will be clothed in white. He's the King of Kings. He's the Lord of Lords. Yet what we're told at the end of Revelation is that His people, you and me, will be given the same clothes. Our dirty rags will be replaced with a robe of white because our righteousness will be His righteousness.

POURING out illustration? Clothing illustration?

- Righteousness: (Oswalt)

NOTES

Lit. Context

- Isa. 56-66:
 - o Part of smaller section Isa. 59.14-63.6: The Anointed Conqueror
 - Day of Joy: Isa. 61
 - Day of Judgment: Isa. 63

// Passages:

- Mt. 5.3-5: Beautitudes!
- Lk. 4.14-21 as Jesus begins his ministry; stops quote before the day of vengeance

Vs. 1-3: Freedom to the Enslaved

- The Spirit empowers, especially for justice and righteousness (11:2 and 42:1)
- Vs. 1 – not just the preacher of good news, but the bringer of good news!
 - o These people are so broken by life that they have no heart left to try. They are those in deep trouble, sin, and brokenness, and addiction, and being poor, both in spirit and materially
- BP guys say it's seven acts of new creation
- Vs. 2: Year of Jubilee!
 - o the poor are the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, those held back from progress and amelioration by people or circumstances
 - o Like the Emancipation Proclamation?

- Jesus begins His ministry by saying, "This is Me," and He leaves out the vengeance part, not because He is not coming back to judge, but because the first time He has come to bring joy
- The Apostle Paul will say, "It is for freedom that Christ has set me free" (Galatians 5:1). You and I are not bound in slavery to perfection or performance or legalism or death. No, Jesus has come to set us free!
- Binds – Found in Ps. 147.3; Isa. 30.26, what the leaders have NOT done.
 - **Psalm 147:2–3 (NIV) — 2** The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. **3** He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
 - **Isaiah 30:25–26 (NIV) — 25** In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. **26** The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.
 - **ILL:** Binding up wounds; Lily's wounds; the early Church caring for those with diseases
 - This is not just someone who has the gift of gab. This is somebody who does something about the hurting
- Vs. 3 – New clothes
 - The broken are given new clothes: a priestly turban, and anointed with joy, and then they become a tree
 - Garment (דָּגָן)
 - Isa. 52:1: Jerusalem is clothed with beautiful garments because she is the holy city.
 - Isaiah 59:17: The LORD puts on garments of vengeance
 - Isaiah 63:1-3: The Lord is clothed in crimson garments of judgment
 - Isaiah 64:6: Our righteous deeds are like polluted garments
 - Clothe (לְבַשׁ)
 - Isa. 52.1; 59.17: See above
 - Isaiah 22:21: Eliakim will be clothed and given the authority to rule

- ILL Ideas:
 - From ragged clothes to beautiful clothes
 - Clothes shopping, but you can have whatever you want!
 - Hand-me-downs versus going to the store and buying new
- These people go from crushed to party-goer!
 - ILL: Like the people who dress up for their birthdays celebrating
 - ILL: Maybe an early martyr story & how it led to more followers
- Headdresses – only used here and in chapter 3 to describe the haughty Lady Zion
- He's going to turn us all into trees!
 - Trees were used earlier in 1:29-31 to talk about how the people desired these oaks, and they glorified themselves over God. They were burned up, but here they have become strong oaks. John Oswalt says, "Try to make ourselves mighty, we burn ourselves up. Admit ourselves helpless and doomed, and God gives us His beauty."

Vs. 4-9: Purpose to the Ruined

- After he clothes his people, he gives them a new purpose. He calls them to rebuild and to be his ministers, to be the people they were always meant to be, to shine his light so that all the nations might come to know him. This is what Israel was meant to do, but they failed. Now that the Servant has come and clothed them, he gives them a new purpose and empowers them to do the work they were always going to do
 - ILL: JFK at NASA talking to the custodian. What are you doing? I'm helping you put a man on the moon. The janitor understood that his small service was playing an even greater purpose. Even the small things that we do can play a big role in the kingdom of heaven.
- Their seed will bring life to the world!

Vs. 10-11: Righteousness to the Undeserving

- The Lord (59:15-20) and the Servant (61:9-10) wear the garments of salvation!
- One of the greatest gifts that the Lord gives us is his righteousness. Our right standing with God, and he enables us to live rightly

- Clothed
 - o Revelation 7:9-10: The saints are clothed in white robes, all the nations
 - o ILL
 - Wearing the same clothes as Lily with pic!
 - o We are undeserving – the whole of Isaiah has talked about how the people are unrighteous! They have trusted in idols, they have trusted in political alliances, they have trusted in their own works, and as a result they are unrighteous! Isaiah 64.6 says, **“Isaiah 64:6 (NIV) — 6** All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” Our righteousness was like filthy disgusting rags, but now we are clothed with the servant.
- Righteousness: grace to save and power to enable righteous living (Oswalt)
- Vs. 11 – a new Garden!
 - o Revelation 22:1-5: Healing of the nations, His servants are there. Jesus brings about the restored world. It is a land of abundance and right relationships. This is a new Garden of Eden
- Amazing Grace? John Newton story?

Extra Intro:

What thoughts run across your mind? I recognize that for so many of us, our thoughts about God are skewed by our own experiences (maybe we didn't have a good dad, and we put that on God). Our thoughts about God are so skewed by how we feel in the moment (maybe we feel as if God is distant, so we think he is). Our thoughts about God may or may not be true. It's important for us to make sure our picture of God aligns with the picture given to us in Scripture.

I'm known as a cheapskate to my family, talk to my brother especially. He likes to point that out! But something changed when we had kids. I remember a year ago or so, and Lily was really into watching *Lion King 1 1/2*. And one day, I went to Walmart just to pick something up for Jonelle so we could make a meal together. As I was doing that I stopped by the clearance aisle and in the clearance aisle I saw something that I thought

Lily would like. In my past life of cheap-skateness I would not have even batted an eye and would have kept walking but I thought to myself, "I think my kid will like this," so I checked out, paid the \$4, and went home and got to see the kid's smile on her face when I gave her the gift.

Conclusion: What is your picture of God? Do you think he wants to hold back from you? Do you think he wants you to falter and fail? Do you think he wants to withhold from you? No. We have a God who loves to give good gifts. EM Bounds: "Christ holds himself ready to supply exactly and fully all the demands of faith and prayer." (Cup overflowing with water). We have a God who loves to pour out blessing upon blessing upon blessing. We have a God who wants us to experience all that he is, and as we do, then we overflow and begin to pour out to others.