

## **The Mandate for Ministry**

**Isaiah 61:1-11**

**By [Billy Dempsey](#)**

Please be seated. David's welcomed visitors; I also extend a warm welcome to Belhaven students I see several of out here tonight. We're glad you're here. It's a big night for all of us. It's a big night for RUF Belhaven. We appreciate you being here this evening. Seth's installation tonight as RUF campus minister at Belhaven University gives us an opportunity to think together about what the Scripture says about Gospel ministry. What is it? Maybe as some of our skeptical friends might ask, "What good is it?" I want us to consider from the book of Isaiah, if you begin to turn to Isaiah chapter 61 I think it's a great chapter for us to see what Isaiah says, inspired as he was by God's Spirit, to look at, "What is Gospel ministry?"

Really I want you to look at three things as we read through this passage together. It's a rich passage and we have only a few moments this evening. Maybe it will pique your hunger and your interest to go and do some study of this great chapter on your own. But pay attention to these three things as I read through Isaiah 61. Pay attention to the commission or the mandate that God gives for the proclamation of the good news. Pay attention to what Isaiah says the good news does in the lives of those who hear it and respond. And then finally pay attention to what Gospel people do in their world. The commission or the mandate, what the good news does in the lives of those who hear it and respond, what Gospel people do in their world. You'll remember as I begin to read this passage and you begin to follow along you'll recognize it as the passage that Jesus read from in the synagogue at Nazareth as He was describing His ministry to the folks that knew Him, that watched Him grow up. He uses that passage to describe His public ministry. Before we read, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, attend Your Word with blessing, with the power of Your Spirit. Attend Your Word with resurrection life. As we hear it, as we think about it together, as it's applied to us, open our minds and open our hearts for Your honor and Your glory among us and the furthering of Your work in us and through us. We make our prayer in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Isaiah 61 beginning in verse 1:

The Spirit of the Lord 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. 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.

Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.

For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong, I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of their peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.

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. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.

## **I. The Commission that God gives for the Proclamation of the Good News**

What is the commission or the mandate that God gives for the proclamation of His Word? It's right there; the first part of verse 1. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." Let's recognize that it is the Lord who sends His Spirit for the preaching of the Gospel. It is the Lord who has anointed the preacher to bring good news to the poor. New American Standard translates "poor" as "afflicted." That's the language of being set apart. That's the language of calling. That's the language

of public office. All of us are called in one way or another and as we move about the highways and byways of life to spread the Gospel, to spread the good news, to talk to folks that we live around and work around and have business with about what the Lord has done for us. That's not what Isaiah has in mind here. Isaiah has in mind the public office, the public office of the proclamation of the good news. The one who is sent, the one who is called and sent for that very purpose, the one whose business it is, as it were, whose calling it is, whose life it is to be about the business of proclaiming the good news of the Gospel to the afflicted. What Isaiah is telling us is that God calls and He sets apart and He empowers with His Spirit men who are called to that purpose. The initiative is God's, the calling is God's, the equipping and the empowering are God's.

### **A Call to Ministry**

Seth had the recognition at some point in his life, a sense of internal call, a sense of desire to give himself to Gospel ministry. And so he looked for opportunities for ministry that allowed him to test his gifts, that allowed him to see if that desire had any root in ability and in temperament. At some point he began to prepare himself with a theological education under the supervision of elders, under the supervision of a church family, under the supervision of a presbytery. What we do tonight is not to create a calling but to recognize a calling. What we do tonight is recognize and in a sense to ratify--that, yes, what God has done in Seth Starkey's life seems real to us. We recognize a call there. We recognize an equipping and empowering for ministry there. We recognize that God has made this man ready for ministry among us, ministry among the students at Belhaven University. So we confirm his internal sense of call with an external call. We're ratifying, we're recognizing that God has, we believe, given this man an anointing for service, for preaching the good news, for proclaiming the good news to the afflicted.

### **A Ministry of the Word**

And it really is a ministry of the Word. Seth, nor any minister is left to wonder what to do. We're not left to wonder what our job description is. Here is it - to proclaim the Gospel to those who are ruined by sin. Did you hear those descriptive clauses in verses 2 and 3? Those who are broken, those who are brokenhearted, those who are captives, those who are in mourning - those are people whose lives are ruined by sin. They're the afflicted ones. They're the ones that need to hear the good news. They're the ones that God is searching for and seeking and sends the preacher out to find with the good news of the Gospel. "There's hope for you! There's life for you! Your brokenness is not the end of the story. God has more. Hear what Jesus has done!" It is a ministry of the Word.

### **A Ministry of Deeds**

But did you watch as I read? It's not only the ministry of the Word but there are

times for appropriate action, appropriate ministry of deed that accompanies a ministry of the Word. Did you see that in verse 3, that the one who is anointed, the one who is called, the one who is empowered also grants something to those who mourn in Zion, he gives something to those who are mourning, he gives them the oil of gladness? There's a doing capacity as well as a preaching capacity. But don't let the tail wag the dog. It is the proclamation of the Word; it is the proclamation of the Gospel that is front and center. We thank the Lord for James' balance, the balance that James gives us - "faith without works is dead." There are works that accompany faith. There is deed ministry that accompanies Word ministry, but it is Word ministry, it is proclamation that comes first and foremost. We see its emphasis right here in Isaiah 61.

## **II. What the Good News does in the Lives of those who Hear it and Respond**

Well what does the good news do? Well we look at these verses here. We look at the latter part of verse 1 all the way through the beginning of verse 3. We find people who are broken and hurting, they're mourning, they're captives, their lives are in tatters. Jesus said, as He looked at the crowds He was teaching in Matthew chapter 9 He says, "These people are harassed and helpless; they are like sheep without a shepherd. They're broken, they're confused, and their life is chaotic and unstable." But look at the latter part of verse 3. What does the good news do? Look what happens as the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed by the preacher anointed, called, empowered. "They may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified." It's the preaching of the Gospel! It's the preaching of the good news to the broken, to the afflicted, to the captives, to the mourning that changes them, that restores them, that changes them from one condition to another - from brokenness to this marvelous image of oaks of righteousness.

Think about that oak forest, that strong, indomitable, enduring, unyielding image - the oaks of righteousness; the planting of the Lord. This is what God does as the Gospel is preached. Paul talked about preaching the whole counsel of God as God's Word is laid open for His people. He makes us different. He makes us new. He makes us who we would not be. That's what happens as the good news is let loose. That's what happens as the good news is preached. The broken become oaks of righteousness. The mourning becomes the planting of the Lord for the glory of God.

## **III. What Gospel People Do in their World**

I must move on. What do Gospel People do? Well I don't have time to go through the rest of the chapter. We read it and the purpose of that was to pique your appetite somewhat. Let me just read verse 4. What do Gospel People do? "They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations, they

shall repair the ruined cities, the devastation of many generations.” Gospel People restore the world, broken and shattered by sin, one person at a time. A story’s told of a pair of medical doctors commissioned as missionaries by the Moravian Church. If you’ve not heard of the Moravian Church, they pioneered much of what we understand and know and do in modern missions. Well these two missionaries, these two doctors, medical missionaries, were sent to the Philippines where they settled in an isolated community with no other Christian witness. They had three goals - to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all who would listen, to ease the suffering of the sick and the injured with their medical skill, and to offer what help they could to any in need. Soon after their arrival a delegation from the town council came to see them. “We don’t want you here. This is a bad town. Too much crime, too much badness. Do you know what the name of our town means? It means corruption and it is very corrupt town!”

The missionaries continued their work and a few years later another delegation came from the town council. “We don’t want you here. It is very dangerous for you. Our people are too bad. It is not safe for you. We don’t want to change. Our town is corruption and so are we.” And so the missionaries continued their work. In a few years more, another delegation came from the town council. “We are here to tell you today that we have changed the name of our town. It will now be called Easter Town because of what Christ has done for us and how He has changed us. He has given us new life.” The oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord for His glory. Gospel People change a broken world one person at a time - how? By proclaiming the good news to the afflicted and the broken.

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, thank You for the power of the good news. Thank You for the power of Your Spirit. Thank You that it’s not up to Seth or up to me or up to any preacher or any of the rest of us to accomplish things but it’s Your church to build, that You are the One through Your Son who seeks and saves sinners, that You call us to be Your fellow workers in that great enterprise. The power is Yours. The calling is Yours. The equipping is Yours. So now bless us and bless Seth as he prepares to take that step to do that ministry among us. And open wide doors of service at Belhaven and throughout our presbytery for Your glory so that we may see those oaks of righteousness and rejoice in the planting of the Lord. Hear us, our Father, as we make our prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the [First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement](#).*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to RPM**

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).