

Delighting in Salvation

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[0 : 00] Thank you so much, Malcolm. Thanks, Simon, for leading. What a joy to see you all this morning, and a big warm welcome to you at home. My name's James. I'm on the staff team. I'll give us a bit of a steer through our passage this morning.

What a joyful passage. What a joyful psalm. We sung together there earlier. Let's pray as we begin. Amen. Father, we have just sung that you have shown us your salvation.

Therefore, help us to praise you, Lord. Help us to look to this passage now and see how you have shown us our salvation, how you have promised to make us oaks of righteousness, and therefore we should sing.

So help us to sing to you this morning as we go out the rest of today. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder, as we begin, if I can ask you, how do you feel about trees?

During COVID, we spent a lot more time than usual wandering outside, and we've seen lots of trees. We've seen little sprouts sprouting up, and we've seen great big oaks in the field.

[1 : 16] We've seen magnificent trees. And rather piddly little trees. We've seen trees of all sorts. And sometimes we look to trees as a source and a picture of life.

They make oxygen. When the wind blows, the leaves rustle, and it's haunting. It's music. They sound alive. They look alive. Animals live in them, securely protected.

They give shade and fruit. I think it's right to say that once all of Britain was covered by trees at one point. And for thousands of years, trees were the largest thing that people knew.

There was nothing bigger than a big, glorious tree. And there's something majestic about a tree. And there's probably no tree that's more majestic than the oak.

It's solid. It's steadfast. It's majestic. It's enduring. And it's played a significant part in British history. I don't know where it stands in Scots history.

[2 : 23] But we think of Drake fighting the Spanish Armada. And we think of Agincourt and English oak or British oak. I don't know if those are good things or bad things. But as we've looked at the book of Isaiah at St. Silas, you've probably noticed all the tree images in this book.

And we see a brilliant one this morning in verse 3, that God's people will be called oaks of righteousness. And God promises that if we believe and trust in Him, then we will be called oaks of righteousness.

An oak, solid, enduring, standing, majestic, of righteousness, of being perfectly right with God.

And you might wonder, how is it that we've ended up here? See, as we've looked at Isaiah, God's people have not been righteous.

In chapter 1, we read that God says of His people, you will be like an oak, but with fading leaves, like a garden without water.

[3 : 32] A mighty man will become tinder, and his work a spark. Both will burn together, and no one will quench the fire. And later in Isaiah, we read how because God is so angry at the injustice that He sees, and how His people have turned away from Him and rejected them, that He's promised that He'll chop them down, and then whatever stumps remain, He'll put to fire, and He'll burn them.

And it makes you think of those trees in the southern Namibia, in the dustpans there, once flourishing, but now absolutely dead. And they've been dead for hundreds of years, five, six, seven hundred years, and they've been burnt black by the sun.

And so in Isaiah, what we've seen, all that is left of God's people, and God's promises to prosper His people, is a smoldering stump up until this point.

So how did we get here, where God says, that He'll call us oaks of righteousness?

By oaks of righteousness, I think as I mean someone who is sincere in their devotion to God, someone who's not double-minded, someone who's more concerned about their private love of

God than their public displays, someone who's more concerned about what their children think about Jesus and about God than about their kids' schooling, perhaps, someone who might model to their spouse a godly service and sacrifice and devotion and all things, and if their spouse doesn't believe in Jesus, praise deeply, and often they would.

[5 : 15] Someone who entrusts all their worries to life to God, and you can go on with that list. So how did we get here in Isaiah that God calls His people oaks of righteousness?

I think the answer that we see in this passage is that Isaiah answers this by saying, God's Spirit-empowered servant brings about a great reversal in which God's people play a part and which leads them to delighting in God.

So God's Spirit-empowered servant brings about a great reversal in which God's people play a part, which leads to delighting in God. And so we're going to look at those under those headings.

So God's Spirit-empowered servant who brings about a great reversal. We're looking at verses 1 to 3. And we meet our servants in the very first verse of our passage. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

And what Isaiah is saying is that the servant has been sent by God to proclaim good news.

[6 : 34] Well, you'll notice by my accent that I'm not Scots. I love Scotland. I love being here. But I wasn't born here. One of the things that I've learned to love about Scotland, and in particular, following Scots sports, and I think it's true for whatever national team you support in Scotland, is that they've got a knack of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

And it could be badminton. It could be rugby. It could be football. It could be anything. It makes being a Scotland supporter quite fun, and it's quite endearing. But in verses 1 to 3, we have the exact opposite.

We have a great victory snatched from certain defeat. So just look down there at verse 1. The servant is announcing good news to the poor.

And then we read how he will bind up the broken heart of those whose hearts have been shattered. He'll mend them. He'll pull all the little bits together and glue them together and make them whole again.

And he'll announce the prisoners in deep darkness will be released. There'll be a great victory, a great reversal. And then verse 3, we see those who have ashes on their head, and that's perhaps some sort of shame or sadness.

[7 : 59] They'll have a crown of beauty. And those mourning will be joyful. And those who are despairing, and there's been lots of mourning and despairing recently, will be clothed and dressed in praise.

And we even see a great reversal in how Isaiah speaks of the last day of history, the day of vengeance, in verse 2, where God will once and for all make the whole world right, where he'll put all things right, where he'll settle all the wrongs that we see in the world, where all the bad things that you and I have done will be brought to light, and God will judge us for them and put them right. And we'll agree with God in his judgment. Even on that day, there will be an unexpected, joyful reversal. That on that day, some people will find favor from God.

It will be a year of the Lord's favor. No one deserves it, but it will be an unexpected, joyful reversal. And the final great reversal that we see is in the servant himself.

So I wonder if you, if you've been following Isaiah, the servant speaking here is the same one who God has sent earlier in Isaiah to die for people's sins. But here, in Isaiah 61, he's alive again.

[9 : 29] It's the greatest reversal possible. It's a death-to-life reversal. I think part of this reversal comes because the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on him.

That spirit that God used to create the world right in the start of Genesis, God puts on his servant to bring about a new creation and the greatest reversal, a new flourishing.

So how does the burnt-out stump of an oak that was God's people become an oak of righteousness, majestic, enduring, through God's spirit-empowered servant who brings about a great reversal?

And then, the second thing we see is that we are called to play a part in this. Verses 49, in which God's people play a part. And this was really the thing that blew me away as I was preparing this week.

You see, the very thing that you and I have done in pulling down all the good things that God has done in the world, in smashing things, God calls us to join together with him in rebuilding stuff.

[10:42] Isn't that awesome? Isn't that incredibly gracious? He calls us to come together with him and rebuild the thing that we so long and so often sought to destroy and pull down.

It's like, imagine giving your toddler or someone like that a brilliant present, and it's magnificent and they take it and they throw it on the ground and they smash it and they destroy it and you go over to them and you say, well, that's wrong and you tell them why it's wrong.

But then you sit down next to them and you painstakingly gather all the pieces and you work with them to put it all together and you encourage them. You wait for them to do it slowly, slowly, slowly, even though they're not very good at it.

You call them to work with you in putting together that great thing that was lost. It's incredibly kind and gracious of God.

So verse 4, they will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will rebuild Jerusalem, the city that was sacked because of people's, God's people's sinfulness that they had to flee from.

[11:52] They will restore the places long devastated. They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. God's people who had been sent away in exile would be brought back and God calls them to rebuild the thing that their very sinfulness destroyed.

So I don't know what things you've done wrong in your life because of your own sinfulness. I don't know the sinful things that you have struggled with for ages. But in verses 1 to 3, God says, He will do the impossible He'll call dead things to life.

Verses 4, He says, He's going to call you to join with Him in fixing that thing, the very thing that you've destroyed and that He is going to do it all. It's all going to be completely His own doing.

Isn't that incredibly gracious and kind? But that's not all. Just look down at verse 6. And you will be called priests of the Lord. You will be named ministers of our God.

You'll feed on the wealth of nations and their riches. In their riches, you'll boast. See, God is going to use you to stand between Him and others and they'll be glad about that.

[13:10] He's going to use you as His representative even though you are someone who is against Him. He's going to use you as His representative.

You're going to speak on His behalf. And people are going to hear that good news that you proclaim and they'll be generous in return. They'll rejoice in what they hear.

So even though you've wrecked it with God, God is going to use you to speak to others on His behalf. Isn't that astounding? That's what a priest does.

They minister between people and God. And then just notice there verse 7. God will give back to them the thing that they thought they'd lost, their inheritance.

The thing, whatever that thing might be that in your sinfulness you think you've lost, God is going to give it back to you. You're going to get your inheritance back and you'll rejoice in it and there will be everlasting joy because of that.

[14:12] And the reason that God does all this is because God loves to do what He has promised. In verse 8. He always keeps His word.

And then the covenant that He's speaking about there, I will make in my faithfulness, I always keep my word, I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

The covenant that He's talking about is possibly that one in chapter 59 where God says He'll give His spirit to those who trust Him. He will always be with them and He'll give them His words to say. They'll always have their words, His words on their lips. Isn't that incredibly humbling? And so what we have seen is that God makes us oaks of righteousness through His spirit-empowered servants who brings about a great reversal in which He calls us to play a part in that changing.

and then finally in verses 10 and 11 in which we are called, we are led to delighting in God about.

[15:23] So let me ask you, how would you feel if the impossible was done in your life? How would you feel if you think if the thing that you thought would never change was changed?

How would you feel if there was an amazing reversal and God has used you in that? and God has called you to represent Him to others.

And that's, how would you feel if God did that? You'd be amazed, you'd be delighted, wouldn't you? And so despite all the odds, God has transformed a smoldering oak stump from the early chapters of Isaiah into a beautiful oak of righteousness.

righteousness. And in 10 and 11 we get a wonderful picture of how we should respond. And so whenever the work of the servants is spoken of in Isaiah and whenever the servants is spoken of in Isaiah, there's a little song of praise afterwards.

This is how God wants us to respond to His servants. So look down at verse 10. I will greatly delight in the Lord. My soul rejoices in the Lord.

[16:35] So let me ask you this morning, are you rejoicing? Are you delighting in God? It's a bit of a naff illustration. I'm going to use it because I couldn't think of a better one.

But a couple of years ago I was skiing, that's why it's naff because we don't all ski. And I was at the top of this tricky run and there was a 10-year-old boy dressed in black and there was an 8-year-old boy dressed in black and there was a 6-year-old girl dressed in pink head to toe.

And the 10-year-old boy looked at the run and he said, this is going to be dangerous. And the 8-year-old boy said, I don't think we should do this. And the 6-year-old girl dressed in pink launched herself off the top and said, this is going to be brilliant as she flew down the slope.

And I think lots of times when we come to God, we come more like those little boys. We say, let's keep him at arm's length. Let's not get too delighted about him.

When we should really respond like that little girl, be absolutely thrilled and delighted that God has shown us his salvation, that he has made you an oak of righteousness even though you were as dead as that dead tree in the desert, dead for hundreds of years, burnt black by the sun.

[17:56] So just look down at verse 10. He has clothed you with garments of salvation. He's given you his own clothes. He's given you God's robes of righteousness.

And then, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest and as a bride adorns herself with jewels, God has dressed you like a bridegroom and a bride on their wedding day.

I haven't been to many weddings, but I am guessing that if I went to a wedding and the bridegroom and the bride weren't rejoicing or delighted at it, that's probably not a good sign.

Normally, the bridegroom and bride are absolutely thrilled and delighted. And that's the picture that is being painted here. God has done a brilliant thing and he wants you to be thrilled.

I don't want to play down how hard life and church has been during COVID recently. Many of us might be sitting here wondering about job, be wondering about work, be wondering about lots of things and not feel very much like rejoicing.

[19:07] But whatever you do, don't lose your joy and delight in God. Don't let unhappiness with God, keeping Him at arm's distance become your settled default state.

But let delighting in God be the thing that you naturally lean to because of everything that He's done for you. Life at the moment is a bit of a knife edge.

Your faith at the moment might feel small and insignificant, but just look down at verse 11. For as the soil makes the young plant, come up, something small, and as the garden causes seeds, a tiny little seed to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before Him. God will make you into a brilliant oak of righteousness. And the reason for all of this is that God wants people all over the world to praise Him.

And so we see that at the end of verse 3, for the display of His splendor. Then at the end of verse 9, that the people, that they will look at you and say, those are the people that the Lord has blessed.

[20:18] They'll praise the Lord. And then finally at the end of verse 11, and praise will spring up before all the nations. And so, in conclusion, what we see in this passage is God's

Spirit-empowered servant brings about a great reversal in which God's people are called to play a part, you and me, which should lead us to delighting in God.

God makes His people oaks of righteousness through His servants. You might well ask, well, who is the servant? Who is God's Spirit-empowered servant?

Who is the servant that Isaiah 53 speaks about who was pierced for our transgressions, who was crushed for our iniquities? The punishment that brought us peace was laid on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

Well, in the Gospel of Luke, we read how Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, went up to Galilee, and when He taught there, everyone praised Him. And then we read how He went into a synagogue one Sabbath, and He stood up and He picked up a scroll, a Bible in that day, and He opened it to Isaiah 61, and He read, the Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

[21:46] And then Luke goes on, and then He sat down, and everyone watched Him, and Jesus said, today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Sometimes when we hear that passage in Luke, we think that Jesus was sent by God to do nice things, and that's certainly true. It's certainly not less than that, but it's also so much more than that. When Jesus was reading Isaiah 61, He was saying, today, God's Spirit-empowered servant is here, who will bring about the most astounding reversal, who walks beside you and calls you to join with Him in playing a part, who promises to fill your heart with delight as He trusts, as you trust in Him day by day.

He has come to make a smoldering stump of God's people alive again, and to make them oaks of righteousness. For God's great praise.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your servant. We thank You for Your Son, who suffered so much for us, who took a people who were not a people, not Your people, made them Your people, who took burnt-out oaks, burnt-out stumps, and made them oaks of righteousness.

[23 : 11] Please help us to go out today doing what You've made us. Help us to be righteous in all we do, and great thanks. Help us to be delighted in all we do, trusting in Your Son more and more each day.

In Jesus' name. Amen.