

Looking out to Stop Abuse in Families

March 8, 2009 – Isaiah 61

We have heard about the reality from Joanne. But we might be tempted to conclude “not in St. Albert.” Hopefully by now through this message series, we have learned we cannot say “not in St. Albert” about most social issues. To find out a little more about the abuse issue. We talked to a staff member of the St. Albert Stop Abuse in Families or SAIF society. She told us they are trying to change the perception that St. Albert does not have any social issues. They provided 400 hours worth of free counseling last year. They spoke at various schools to around 5000 students. They identify Elder abuse as a huge and growing issue. And they’re not talking about abuse of church elders. Senior citizens of our society suffer various forms of abuse often from their own family members. SAIF literature states there are various forms of abuse: physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, financial, and spiritual as well as damage to property and pets.

Abuse is mistreatment, cruelty, violence, neglect, manipulation, name-calling, swearing, hurting, harming and taking advantage of others weaker or smaller. It can happen to spouses, children and the elderly. Sadly, humans have abused each other since

Adam and Eve. We recently studied the sibling battle between their sons Cain and Abel. It escalated to Cain murdering his brother. It continues today in the community and in Christian homes. So now that we have the problem out there and on the table, how can it be addressed from a spiritual perspective? Does God even care about the abused? What about the abuser? As God’s people, how can we offer hope and help in the face of this reality?

Well, I’m here to tell you today that God has not stood idly by neglecting the victims of abuse. God has shown His heart for the weakest members of society throughout history. Today, we are going to discover **The Sovereign God anointed His Servant to proclaim and provide hope for the weak.** God has commissioned His servants to constantly proclaim hope and deliverance amidst oppression. But God not only hurled words. He delivered healing and hope.

The people of Israel suffered great abuse. Most of us can’t even imagine the humiliation they went through. The Babylonians invaded their country. They knocked down their cities and destroyed their army. They slaughtered thousands, ravaged the women and burned the crops. They forced thousands of Israel’s leading citizens to make the

four month journey to Babylon. Israel ceased to exist as an independent nation. Talk about humiliating. Yet God proclaimed a message of hope to this people before they even experienced this humbling. He commissioned the prophet Isaiah to prophesy hope after the devastation. But God also provided for this hope by bringing back a remnant from Babylon. Then God renewed this message when Jesus proclaimed it about 600 years later. Jesus announced and delivered hope through His words, life, death and resurrection. This hope message especially applies to victims of abuse, abusers themselves and God's people who desire to minister to these families.

So to unpack God's hope message today, we will ask three questions of it:

- What does God proclaim?
- What does God provide?
- What commission does God give to His people? Our text is Isa.61

Isaiah 61:1-11

The Year of the LORD's Favor

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach 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]

- 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 gladness
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.
- 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 Aliens 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 their shame
my people will receive a double portion,
and instead of disgrace
they will rejoice in their inheritance;
and so they will inherit a double portion in their land,
and everlasting joy will be theirs.
- ⁸ "For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and iniquity.
In my faithfulness I will reward them
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."

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 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.

Luke 4:14-20

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷The 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,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."^[a]

²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

What does God proclaim?

Verse 1 of Isaiah 61 contains the beginning of the hope message. Talk about a hope-filled verse! But before we dive in, let's not miss the very first phrase. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on

me." Isaiah did not put together some inspiring words after a good day in his life. This proclamation depended on the Spirit of God. The prophet needed the Spirit of the Lord and His power because this message would contain much more than clichés or tired expressions. This message promised a revolutionary, redemptive work that would absolutely depend on the Lord for accomplishment. Notice also it is the Spirit of the *Sovereign Lord*. This comes from the top; the ruler of the universe; the creator of the world delivers this message. What does He proclaim?

▪ **Good news to the poor. (1)**

The poor can be those in physical poverty. But it also refers to those downtrodden and disadvantaged; those helpless in themselves at the mercy of powerful people and difficult circumstances. One commentator defines the poor this way. The poor are "those in deep trouble, not those who were comfortable and in control. Those who are broken by life and have no more heart to try. Those who are so bound up in their various addictions that liberty and release are a cruel mirage; those who think that they will never again experience the favor of the Lord, or see his just vengeance meted out against those

who have misused them; those who think their lives hold nothing more than ashes, sackcloth, and the fainting heaviness of despair.” This message from God somehow contains good news for them. What else does God proclaim?

▪ **Bandaging up of the brokenhearted. (1)**

Brokenhearted translates a word covering any and every human breakdown whether it be emotional or conviction of sin. The message declares that somehow God will bandage together those with broken hearts.

God also proclaims **liberty for the captives (1)** in verse 1. Is there a more pointed description for an abused woman or elder living in the prison of their own home? The phrase liberty may refer to the liberation of slaves during the year of Jubilee. Every fiftieth year, God commanded Israelites to release their slaves from bondage. They were once slaves in Egypt. The Lord released them. So we’ve seen they were to release others from debts every seven years. Then after the seventh cycle of seven years, the year of Jubilee would proclaim release for all slaves. Sadly, we can find no evidence that Israel ever

complied with this command of the Lord. But the Lord did not forget His heart to liberate captives. It’s part of His hope message.

He also proclaims the **release from darkness for the prisoners or blind. (1)** Release means to open the eyes like bringing prisoners out of a dark dungeon into light. All these proclamations from verse 1 focus on hope from a human perspective. These proclamations would directly assist those in need.

In verse 2, the proclamations shift to a divine perspective. The messenger proclaims **the Year of the Lord’s Favor and the Day of the Lord’s Vengeance.** A year implies a long period of time. The coming of the Lord’s anointed one marks a prolonged period in which His achievements could be enjoyed. This message originally applied to the Israelites returning home from the exile in Babylon. The Lord’s favor would pour out on His remnant as they rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

But the year of the Lord’s favor didn’t end with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. When Jesus’ turn came to read the scroll in the synagogue, this was the passage to be read. Jesus reads up to the “year of the Lord’s favor.” Then He stops. He then proclaims “today,

this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” In other words, He claimed to be the messenger to bring the good news to the poor. He would bind up the brokenhearted. He proclaimed the arrival of another time of the Lord’s favor.

Through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated the “day of salvation.” The Gospel would be preached all over the world. It was a time of the Lord’s favor. We live in that time. We live in an age when God continues to proclaim good news to the poor and bandage up the brokenhearted. He continues His saving work today.

But why did Jesus stop in the middle of this phrase? Why didn’t He continue on when there was so much good news further on in the Isaiah passage? Well, we don’t know for sure. But it is possible that Jesus stopped because His first coming initiated the new age of the Lord’s favor. When He comes back however, He will bring the Day of Vengeance. This is the Day of Judgment when all will be called to account before the Lord Jesus. It will be sudden, unexpected and short.

Yet even this day of vengeance comforts the poor and brokenhearted. It ensures that all wrongdoing will one day be called to

account. It will be a time when abuses done in the dark behind closed doors will be exposed in the light for all to see. No one will get away with anything. God’s vengeance is just repayment. Those not protected by Christ’s blood will face God’s vengeance. Christians will be protected by Christ’s blood from God’s wrath because He poured out the wrath we deserved on to Christ on the cross. So the messenger proclaims the year of the Lord’s favor and day of vengeance.

(What about Christian abusers?)

There is one more component to the hope message. In the last half of verse 2 the Lord proclaims **comfort to all who mourn**. Now that is a remarkable and ridiculous proclamation. Who could possibly comfort all who mourn? Who could possibly minister to and provide comfort to everyone in mourning over the loss of a loved one; the loss of a relationship or the loss experienced by sin. ONLY GOD. This promised comfort is not just release from exile but release from condemnation through the forgiveness Jesus has won.

So in just 2 verses, God’s message of hope proclaims good news, bandaging up, freedom, release, favor, vengeance and comfort. But

God does not only talk the talk. He walks the walk. Not only does He proclaim. He provides.

What does God provide?

He provides for those who grieve. Head to toe transformation. Verse 3 describes the complete transformation of a grieving person. When they mourned the Ancient Israelites put ashes on their head, cried and wore sackcloth. This displayed the totality of their mourning. But God provides a total reversal; a beautiful headdress instead of ashes; oil of gladness instead of mourning or weeping and garment of praise instead of despair. Notice it is a head to toe transformation. He adds to the transformation with the oaks of righteousness image. People in mourning are faint, weak and shaking. Oaks are vibrant, strong and stable. The Israelites were mourning in Babylon because of their own sin. They weakened themselves by going after idols and neglecting the strength of the Lord. They could not strengthen themselves. They could not free themselves. But God freed them. He would transform them and plant them again as oaks of righteousness.

God provided a total transforming hope to exiles in Babylon when He arranged for their return. God provides total transforming hope for the lost when they come to Him for salvation. God still transforms hopeless situations into hopeful ones. One way He does that is by raising up people with a passion for ministry like Joanne and others who reach out specifically to those struggling in this area.

We don't have time to go into detail on God's other provisions listed in this passage. But I do want to point them out to you for further study.

God provides a **double portion of blessing instead of shame. (7)**

He provides **rejoicing instead of dishonor. (7)**

The end of verse 7 also reveals God provides **everlasting joy** to His people.

So God proclaims a message of hope. He provides hope to a hurting world and hurting families. What commission does He give to His people who receive this message?

God's commission to His people.

Rebuild and Repair that which is broken down. (4)

Verse 4 describes the rebuilding and restoring of ruins and devastation. The Israelites returning from exile would literally do this work when they rebuilt their nation. But God continues to call His people to join His rebuilding and repairing work today. That means we first need to cooperate with God's rebuilding and restoring work in our own lives. Each Christian here is still incomplete. We are a work in progress growing towards Christlikeness. God continues His work in our lives restoring us from the stain of sin and making us more and more holy in character. So we need to cooperate and not hinder that work in our lives by humbly submitting to the work and word of God.

We repair and rebuild by bringing this message of hope to those around us. We must reassure the abused that the year of the Lord's favor still applies to them – it still applies to you. One little pamphlet I have come across lists four messages a victim of abuse needs to hear about God.

1) The Lord hears their/your cries and listens to them.

Psalm 10:17 states – “O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may

strike terror no more.” Psalm 6 verses 8-9 state “The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer.” If we have friends who suffer in abusive situation, we need to imitate the Lord and listen to their cries. The pamphlet states “Listening is important because many victims of violence are reluctant to speak openly. They may fear that openness will lead to retaliation by the abuser. They may feel ashamed that they contributed to the war, although they are not responsible for the violence done to them. They may consider their problems unworthy of a friend's attention. . . . Or they may be reluctant to speak to Christian friends for fear that they will be told to ‘forgive and forget.’”¹ One article subtitled “What would Jesus not do?” charges the church with placing more value on the sanctity of marriage than the safety of women and children and the sanctity of life.² We cannot let our discomfort with the reality of abuse lead to a dismissive, cliché like response.

2) Message of Hope: God does not forget.

¹ Edward T. Welch, *Helping the Victim*, in “Domestic Abuse: How to Help” (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 3.

² Abuse and the Church's Role, <http://www.focusministries1.org/>

Psalm 10:14-15 – But you, O God do see trouble and grief, you consider it and take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you. You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.

3) Message: Jesus knows your/their sufferings.

“At a women’s shelter, a victim of violence is surrounded by people who understand, but in the throne room of God, she will be embraced by One who understands perfectly, grieves deeply and loves completely. Jesus knows your/their sufferings. ”³He experienced violence at the hands of his own people; his own countrymen.

4) The cross is timeless evidence of God’s love for his people and his “toughness with sin.” These are messages of hope for the abused. Help for the abuser: If you are an abuser or you suspect a friend might be abusing someone in their family. ⁴

First of all, you or they need to know about the grace of God. We all need grace. So you/they need to know that God is a gracious God.

We are all sinners and we all need His grace.

But abuse is wrong. Physical abuse is a criminal act. It is a violation of marital vows as damaging as adultery. We must sweep away any cultural acceptance of this practice. Some abusers will say “if we lived back in that time in that place, everyone would see this as a normal disagreement between husband and wife.” That may very well be. People may have thought a physical fight was a legitimate way to resolve differences. But it’s not legitimate according to God. It violates relationships. Anyone who responds with violence to a stressful situation reveals deeper problems. They may live in a fog of evasion and self-justification. They might even live a double life, abusing their spouse or kids at 6 in the evening before going to lead Bible Study at 7.

They/you need Christ. They/you need God-centered repentance, not reputation-centered repentance. The messenger announced the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance. Yes Christ is abundant in loving kindness and he is terrible in wrath.

³ Welch, 5.

⁴ David Powlison and Paul David Tripp, *Helping the Abuser*, “Domestic Abuse: How to Help.”

Abusers need the resources of the community of Christ; professional counsel; accountability; radical honesty; models; encouragement; prayers of intercession. When these are put together there is a possibility of real hope and real help.

So God calls us to join Him in His work of repairing and rebuilding shattered families. If you're not a Christian here today, God wants to start that rebuilding work in your life. Don't miss this opportunity. The year of the Lord's favor continues. But one day it will suddenly end with the arrival of the day of vengeance. To those who carelessly let the year of favor slip by, the day of vengeance will bring vengeance rather than grace.

Isaiah 55:6-7 "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near; Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God for he will freely pardon."

Christians, on top of helping rebuild and repair, we need to celebrate that the good news has come into our lives. We need to put on the garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. We need to celebrate the year of the Lord's favor in our lives and our church's life.

We need to live out Isaiah 61:10 as we approach the Lord's Table. "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 righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."