

A Message of Transformation

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Ali and Stuart. If you've got your Bible, please do keep it open to that chapter, Isaiah 61, as we go through it together.

My dad, he's really into cars. In particular, he's really into classic cars. He's got a real passion for that. It's one that skipped me, but my brother, he also loves all things to do with cars.

But on occasion, I've listened in as they chat about their love for cars. And I've picked up a thing or two, which is finally bearing fruit now that I can use it in a sermon.

My dad, he has an Austin Healey Sprite, 1960s, better known as a Frog Eye Sprite. And when I've heard the two of them chatting about this car, one of the conversations we spoke about was all the things that have changed in this car.

Since it was manufactured to this very day, it's almost a completely different car. The entire engine was replaced. The manual gearbox was tossed, replaced with an automatic gearbox.

[1 : 1 2] The exhaust, the brakes, everything really to do with this car has been changed. It's really undergone a complete transformation over the years.

But if you looked at the car just now, and you saw a picture of the car from 60 years ago, the car would look the same. You wouldn't be able to tell that anything to do with the car has really changed.

And that's because the shell of the car, its outward appearance, it's not changed. All this work of transformation in this car that's gone on, it's happened underneath the shell of the car, on the inside, in a sense.

And that image, I think, helps us get to grips with what's going on in these verses that Stuart read for us. This passage, it's all about transformation.

It's about taking people who are broken, people who are not fit for the purpose they were designed for, and transforming them, transforming us so that we become fit for purpose.

[2 : 2 3] You remember, if you've been here through this series in Isaiah, that at the start of the book of Isaiah, we were kind of faced with God's people being depicted as kind of completely hopeless, failing to live as they were supposed to live.

And I think at the start there, Isaiah kind of had us asking the question of, how are these people going to be sorted? How will they be transformed? How will they be made, again, fit for purpose?

Yes. And so really, the whole book has been leading us up to this point that we come into now in this final third of the book of Isaiah, when Isaiah makes clear to us how these broken people, how these people that are supposed to serve God have failed in so many ways, we see now how they will be transformed, how God will make them to be the people that we're supposed to be.

These verses, they paint for us an amazing image of what it is that the Lord Jesus himself came to do for his people.

And so if we think about this big idea of transformation, we're going to work through the chapter in three sections. And so firstly, we're going to think about the transformation that Jesus brings.

[3 : 43] That's in the first three verses, the transformation that Jesus brings. These are the verses that Jesus took upon his own lips at the start of his ministry.

In Luke chapter 4, it tells us there that as he unrolled the scroll, he found the place where these words were written.

He intentionally sought these very words out. And as he read them at the start of his public ministry, he was saying to the people that were gathered there that he is the Lord's anointed one, that he is the one who has come to make the promises of this chapter happen.

Jesus is the one in whom this transformation is spoken of is made possible. He's the one who's bringing good news to those that need to hear it.

And to the first audience of these verses, the year of the Lord's favor, that would certainly have made them think of something that was called the year of Jubilee that's spoken of in a book called Leviticus.

[4 : 57] And it was a year that happened every 50 years. And during that, there would be good news brought to the poor. There would be lands and property returned to those that it was taken from.

Those who had become servants for different reasons, they would become people who were released. They would be redeemed. It was a year of amazing joy, a year of Jubilee, a year of plenty and of abundance, of provision where the needs of God's people were met, a year of liberty.

Can you imagine what that year must have been like for the people of Israel? Suppose you've made some bad decisions in the last 50 years, or your family have, and the consequences have fallen onto you.

Or maybe you've just been struck with some real misfortune. You end up losing your land. You end up having to become servants of other people. Or maybe you've ended up in a lot of debt, and it's totally crippling you and your family.

And then this year comes. The year of Jubilee arrives, and it's all turned completely upside down. Any debt that you had is completely white clean.

[6 : 26] Any of your land that you'd had to give away is given back to you. If you become someone's servant, you're released, you're redeemed from that.

The year of Jubilee, it was an incredible demonstration of the Lord's kindness as everything was restored, as it was put back to how it should be.

But the year of Jubilee, although an amazing provision by the Lord, it was also something that was pointing forward to something far greater.

The primary focus on the year of Jubilee was on outward things, on things that could be seen and be touched, and those things being restored and made right.

And so although these verses, they intentionally pick up on the language to do with the year of Jubilee, they use that language to illustrate something that Jesus is going to come and do on the inside.

[7 : 31] Something that's going to happen in a spiritual sense. See, Jesus came as the one who would transform people's lives spiritually. He would bring good news to the spiritually poor.

He would bind up those who were brokenhearted. He would proclaim liberty to those who were captive to their own sin. He would transform the spiritually dead into those who would be spiritually alive.

Those who mourn, we read, will be transformed and they'll have gladness. We also read there that those who have a faint spirit, they'll be given the garment of praise.

It's just like the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel. Those who mourn and those who are poor in spirit, we read there, those are the ones who'll be blessed. And then towards the end of verse three in our chapter there, it tells us what's at the very heart of this transformation that Jesus brings.

And it is that those who are unrighteous, they are made righteous. The good news that Jesus proclaims is that because of who he is, because of what he has done, anyone who trusts in him, verse three, can now be called an oak of righteousness.

[8 : 53] And that picture, I think, of an oak tree, is really intentional here. An oak tree is a strong tree. It's steadfast. It's not easily moved.

We read that these oaks of righteousness, they are planted by the Lord for his glory and verity. I think the point being made is that this transformation is completely a work of the Lord.

He gives us the righteousness of his son. He makes us as though we are oaks of righteousness. Even though on our own, we're spiritually poor, we're captives to our own sin, in Christ, he transforms us and he makes us into oaks of righteousness for his glory.

And so we see that Jesus is the anointed one who would come and he would bring about this amazing transformation. And we're going to see that there's real purpose in this transformation.

And that leads us into our second point. Firstly, Jesus is the one who brings this amazing transformation. And now secondly, from verse four through to verse nine, we see that Jesus transforms us so that we can be his priests.

[10 : 19] He transforms us so that we can be his priests. There is a real intentional purpose in us being transformed by Jesus. He doesn't just transform us from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive and then think, okay, that's that job done.

Once we're transformed, we have a new purpose in our lives and that is to be his priests. One of the primary functions of the people of Israel was that they were to be a nation through whom all the other nations would be able to encounter the living God.

But as Israel lived in obedience to God's laws, as they enjoyed his covenant blessings in the land, other nations then should have been able to look upon them and call them blessed because of their amazing God.

But this was a role that Israel were awful at living out. It's something that we've seen time and time again and through Isaiah as God challenges his people for failing to do this.

Instead, they so often rejected God and so they had to endure covenant curses which meant that as other nations looked on at them, they couldn't see how they were any different from the other nations.

[11 : 43] they were supposed to in a sense mediate between God and other nations, bringing them to a knowledge of who God is. But they failed.

Instead, they actually ran after other gods, false gods. And so what we see in these verses is that Jesus transforms individuals from spiritual deadness to spiritual life.

And as he does that, he restores his people to their original purpose. making it possible that they can live out their role of helping others come to know the living God.

We see that in verse 6 if you've got your Bible there. You shall be called priests of the Lord. They shall speak of you as the ministers of our God.

The priests in the Old Testament, they were to facilitate sacrifices sacrifices which would then allow them to reconcile the people back to God.

[12 : 47] Essentially, the key part of their role as priests was to bring people to God. And so as you read in verse 6 that those transformed by Jesus will be called priests of the Lord.

Well then, surely the point being made is that as Christians, we have that same purpose, that same function. Part of the purpose in us being saved is that we can now be a blessing to others.

We can live in a way that allows those around us to be brought to the living God. As we live faithfully and people look on at us, it's only a matter of time before the opportunity comes and we can speak of the God in whom we trust.

And as we speak of Him to others, we are bringing them to the God of the Bible, teaching them of who He is. In verse 3, the image we thought about was that Christ makes us like an oak of righteousness.

Now one thing about an oak tree is that they so often grow to be huge to the point that you can hardly miss them. That's the idea that's being put across here.

[14 : 04] That before a watching world, our righteousness is to be displayed in clear view. Don't worry if you're thinking just now that you sometimes don't do a great job of this.

I think most of us are on the same boat. We know that we made mistakes and we will think a little bit more about that in our third point. But that is a key purpose that we have as God's people.

And it's Jesus that makes it possible for us to live our faith out before a watching world. And we do it for His glory. We see that in verse 9 that all who see the Lord's people they shall acknowledge them that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.

So we don't want people to look at us and think that we're great. but we want people to look at us and know that we live the way that we live because of the abundant blessing that the Lord has placed upon us.

It's not our glory to have but the glory is the Lord's for it's Him who's brought this blessing about us. It's Him who's brought the transformation in our lives.

[15 : 20] And there's a question I think here about how seriously do we take the role we have as His people who are called to bring others to God to help them see how great He is and their need for Him.

Now I know that reaching out to people with the gospel is hard. I know that it's difficult to know the best way to do it sometimes and how to be sensitive how to be winsome and I'm sure we could all use help and wisdom and how best to reach out to a lost world with the good news of who Jesus is and what He has done.

And so I think as we think about that that book that Ali was just encouraging us to read over the summer Honest Evangelism written by a guy Rico Tice who is a world renowned evangelist and a guy that has amazing wisdom to share it's a real gift to the church he's written this book and so I think as for me especially but I think also for all of us as we think about this purpose and God transforming us and bring us into His family how are we going to best live that out before a watching world and I think that book will have a lot of answers to offer us and so I'd really encourage all of us to pick it up on the way out to read it and to ask God to help us as we seek to be His people living faithfully and reaching out to those who need to hear the good news of the Lord Jesus having been transformed by the Lord Jesus we now should desire to fulfil our role of being a light to the nations and so if you do grab that book

I think it would be good as well to not just read it by yourself I think you can do that it would be great but I don't know if there's someone in the church or a few of you in the church that are close that were able to catch up now and again over the summer to chat about what you've read to encourage each other as you think more about what it looks like to evangelise to reach out in this lost world I think that would be a really good and a really fruitful thing that I'm certain the Lord would bless and so Jesus is the one who transforms us Jesus transforms us so that we can be His priests and then thirdly and finally here we see that Jesus has transformed us and is still transforming us Jesus has transformed us and He is still transforming us it's in verse 10 and verse 11 in these closing verses we hear the words that are on the lips of an individual who has come to experience

Jesus' transformation in their own life we see how it's impacted them and we see the immense joy that they have because of the blessing they've received because of what Jesus has done they respond to His amazing kindness in verse 10 as they declare I will greatly rejoice in the Lord my soul shall exult in my God this individual they are looking to God they're focusing on all that He has done for them and that is what is driving them to praise and to worship the living God and in a sense isn't that a picture of what we are doing at this very minute because of what God has done for us through Jesus because of the transformation that He's brought about in our lives we gather here on a Sunday in response to all of that we gather to rejoice in the Lord and the reason for our rejoicing today is the very same as the rejoicing that is spoken of in these verses they go on in verse 10 and they tell us what it is that has caused them to be so joyful they say for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation

[19 : 48] He has covered me with the robe of righteousness they're giving all the glory to God here they're acknowledging that it is the Lord alone who is the author of their salvation they say that God has covered them it's a complete work God has transformed them it has been done when God looks at this person He sees the perfection of His own Son and I wonder if that's something that we can forget or lose sight of sometimes for each of us who have trusted in the Lord Jesus the Lord has robed us in the righteousness of Christ He has clothed us with the righteousness of His own Son taking all of our unrighteousness away and placing it on His Son as He died on the cross in our place and of course this individual is rejoicing and is exalting in the Lord how else would you respond to such incredible kindness this transformation it has completely happened and as we wear the righteousness of Christ there's a real sense of beauty in what He's given us this is why we get the language about a bridegroom and a bride putting on a beautiful headdress and jewels it's to convey the reality of the beauty that we display to those around us due to being clothed in Christ's righteousness and I think there's something really true about that when you think of someone in your life who you look up to in the faith an older brother or sister in Christ and you consider how you would describe that person

I think so often one of the most accurate words to describe them is the word beautiful and I don't mean in terms of their appearance although I'm sure the person you're thinking of looks lovely but there is something about a faithful believer who lives out their righteousness visibly that is just beautiful and so I suppose the challenge comes pretty clearly here to us and that is the beauty of the righteousness of Christ lived out clearly in our lives would people see that beauty in us perhaps through the way that we care for others the way that we might put the needs of others before our own or the way that we continue to love and support people who are dealing with long term struggles not only caring for a few months but being consistent with them in their trials there's real beauty when we see that done so well and so the transformation it has happened it's a complete work and so moving into our final verse and this is a verse that I'm really glad is here

I think it's a great verse for us to end on we've had so much focus on the way that Jesus transforms his people and how he desires us to bless those around us and maybe it feels like the expectation is that we live perfect lives before a watching world but this verse here is helpful and it's realistic for us we read in verse 11 for as the earth brings forth it 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 see much of the transformation in his view so far especially the first few verses it's been speaking about that instant transformation the transformation that takes us from death to life from the certainty of an eternity apart from God and brings us into a personal relationship with the living God forever and that is an amazing transformation that's where our security lies in that transformation that has happened that has been done but it's not it's not the only work of transformation that God does in our lives that even after he saves us there's still so much work to be done because we still often mess up we still revert back to our old sinful ways and so it's a journey that we'll be on until the day that we're called home the idea in verse 11 it seems to be about growth and the way that what is sown in a garden then sprouts up

God has given us salvation but he's promising that he'll continue to change us that he's going to continue to transform us that he's sown salvation into our hearts and that will continue to sprout up in our lives as he shapes us and as he molds us into our people who are getting more and more like his son he gives us his Holy Spirit to help us on this journey of transformation doesn't mean that this journey of transformation will just be a gradual straight line as we grow and grow and grow there will certainly be bumps in the road times when we feel that we've taken a few steps backwards but the hope is that if we look back after a few years we're able to see the small ways in which God has been transforming us and as we see all those small ways they start to make big differences

I remember going on holiday up near Wick in Thurzo with Catherine and I knew one of my lecturers had retired up there and so I suggested that we go and visit him and his wife and Catherine was keen his name is John Angus and so after we'd caught with him and his wife over coffee we left and Catherine the first thing Catherine said to me afterwards was James why can't you be more like John Angus and John Angus is genuinely a lovely Christian brother and he reflects something of the beauty of Christ's righteousness amazingly clearly far more clearly than I do I replied to Catherine saying well if you give me 40 more years maybe I'll maybe I'll get there and we were both obviously kind of joking with each other but there there is real truth in what Catherine said this is a Christian brother with many more miles on the clock and it makes sense that because he's further along on this journey of transformation that he's grown significantly and reflecting the righteousness of Christ but the encouragement for all of us is that when we see such a godly person and we're amazed by the way they reflect

[27 : 29] Christ so clearly the encouragement to us is that they don't have a higher status than we do that they aren't more holy than we are when God looks at John Angus and then looks at me he sees both of us clothed from head to toe in the righteousness of his son all Christians every single person who has put their trust in Jesus we are all clothed in his righteousness and God sees his son's righteousness when he looks at all of us but it is also an encouragement to see the way that God has worked in the lives of other people over many years because it reminds us that God is faithful to us and when he does transform us when he does save us he doesn't just leave us then he continues to mold us and to shape us which is an amazing thing so it's so good to see other Christians who are further along on that journey and to be encouraged that our standing before God is the same as theirs and yet we have that joy to look forward to of continuing to be transformed that we can better reflect the Lord Jesus and his righteousness as the salvation he gives us it's that instant transformation that is what qualifies each of us to be his priests in Christ we are transformed from death to life and as we live out our priestly role

God will continue to shape us and transform us as we bear fruit for him and as we give him all the glory of our lives let's pray together let's pray