

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2012-2013

The Advent and Christmas Messages:

- ♦ Nov 25: Christ Jesus for the Poor (Isa 61:1) ♦ Dec 9: Christ Jesus for the Sad (Isa61:1)
- ♦ Dec 16: Christ Jesus for the Captives (Isa 61:1) ♦ Dec 23: Christ Jesus for Offenders (Isa 61:2)
- ♦ Dec 25: Christ Jesus Is Born (Lk 2:1-12)

CHRIST JESUS FOR THE CAPTIVES: AN ADVENT MESSAGE (ISAIAH 61:1)

I. “...Proclaim Liberty to the Captives...”

II. O Captive Daughter of Zion

- A. While Isaiah’s prophecy ultimately applies to the whole world, it first applies to the Jews in exile.
—Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek.”
- B. After the Jews returned to their homeland, the exile was not yet fully over because so much was still left undone and unfulfilled.
1. The royal Son of David was not yet on the throne.
 2. The glory of God had not yet come back in the powerful way the prophets had foreseen (Isa 66:22).
 3. Instead, Israel was under the rule of yet another arrogant, Godless empire—Rome.
- C. While the Romans generally exercised a hands-off style of governance, the fact that they were still in control implied that all was not right just yet.
1. In a sense, Israel was still in captivity, because the ultimate owner of the land was Rome.
 2. Israel could exist safely *so long* as they did not rebel against the Roman Emperor.
—Caesar was unquestioned ruler of the world.
- D. Why were so many zealous Jews unhappy about that arrangement?
1. The issue was not merely about national sovereignty.
 2. The issue came down to Israel’s relationship to God, and God’s purposes for Israel.
—If God was the rightful Lord of the world, and Israel was God’s chosen nation, submission to a king who did not bow to YHWH God was unacceptable!
- E. To help us further understand the offensiveness of this political arrangement to many faithful Jews, consider Psalm 72.
1. Psalm 72 reveals God’s designs for the King of Israel.
 2. The King of Israel is God’s appointed ruler over all lands and kings.

⁸May he have dominion from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth!

⁹May desert tribes bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust!

¹⁰May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands

*render him tribute;
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts!
11 May all kings fall down before him,
all nations serve him!*

- F. Since God desires for the royal Son of David to be the true World Ruler, rule by a non-Davidic, Godless king is intolerable!
- G. Roman rule is evidence that Israel had not yet been fully restored.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who was the immediate audience of Isaiah 61? (2) Why was the exile not quite over after the Jews had returned to their homeland? What were the signs that things were not yet what they should be? (3) Why was Roman rule offensive to the Jews? (4) What does Psalm 72 teach about the rule of God's chosen King?

III. The Power behind the Rome

- A. The rule of Rome is a symptom of something more insidious.
- B. In Scripture, God teaches us that reality is not simply the physical realm.—Human beings are *not* the only players on the world stage.
- C. There are other intelligences at work—and these are not always good.
 - 1. These intelligences are what the apostle Paul calls the world powers of darkness (Eph 6).
 - 2. These powers are the angels who rebelled against the Lord (Mt 25:41; 2 Pet 2:4).
- D. According to Scripture, these evil world powers work through *idols* (Rev 9:20)
 - 1. They exert their influence through (a) the false gods that people worship; and (b) the complex systems of worship organized around these idols.
 - 2. In the Roman Empire,
 - a. Religion and politics were linked.
 - b. The major gods of Rome were associated with the heavenly bodies—Jupiter, Neptune, Mars, Venus, and Pluto.
 - c. On earth, the Roman Emperor was already worshiped as a divine being.
- E. The real power behind Imperial Rome was Satan himself.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why is the rule of Rome a symptom of something more insidious? (2) According to God's Word, who are the other players on the world stage? (3) How do evil world powers work? (4) How were the evil world powers at work in the Roman Empire?

IV. The World Lies in the Power of the Evil One

- A. But Satan and his rulers stand behind much more than just one ruthless empire or two.
 - 1. Ephesians 6:12: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."
 - 2. 1 John 5:19: "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."
 - 3. The Lord Jesus himself refers to Satan as the ruler of the world (12:31; 14:30; 16:11).
- B. Israel and the rest of the world are enslaved to the Evil One and his powers.
- C. The objective of the evil world powers is to prevent people from returning to God and finding life in Jesus Christ.
 - 1. The evil powers will do whatever they can to distract people from God.
 - 2. The evil powers may prevent people from going to God...

- a. by using the state as their instrument (e.g. atheistic Communist states).
 - b. by teaching people a false value system/worldview that makes them find their ultimate happiness in this world.
3. This second tactic seems to be quite common of the enemy in affluent countries. —If the adversary can get people focused only on keeping themselves afloat, staying ahead of the game, living relatively comfortable lives—he can keep them distracted from the ultimate Reality that gives true life.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What do Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 5:19, and John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 teach about the scope of Satan’s influence? (2) How do Israel and the rest of the world share the same slavery? (3) What is the objective of the evil world powers? (4) What tactic of paralysis does the Evil One seem to use in affluent societies?

V. From Hero to Zero

- A. The human race came into captivity through the disobedience of our first father.
1. Adam listened to the advice of the Evil One.
 2. In doing so, he rejected God as the absolute Lord of his life.
 3. Since Adam was father of the whole human race, his act of disobedience has public consequences—it brought all mankind under the rule of the Evil One.
- B. In Romans 5, the apostle Paul teaches us about the consequences of Adam’s sin.
1. Paul states in 5:12: “sin came into the world *through one man*, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—”
 2. Lest we think that death spread to each person because each person sinned, Paul states in verse 15: “many died *through one man’s* trespass...,” and verse 17, “...*because of one man’s* trespass, death reigned through that one man...”
 - a. All of us were considered sinners in the one man, Adam.
 - b. God considered Adam’s sin to be the sin of each of his future descendants.
 - c. That is why death is the fate of each human being.
 3. Death spread to the human race by the one sin of Adam.
 4. Along with death came the Evil One. —Hebrews 2:14: “the one who has the power of death...is, the devil.”
- C. If we take these biblical facts together, an explanation for why the human race came under the power of the devil emerges.
1. By rejecting God’s absolute rule over him, Adam came under the punishment of God, which is death.
 2. Death (as a form of punishment from God) is the work of the Evil One.
 3. Therefore, God punishes the human race by subjecting the whole human race to the tyranny of the devil.
- D. Once again, we see that God is sovereign over all things—even death.
1. Just as God was the Lord who punished Israel and subjected them to Babylon and the other pagan kings, so God was the Lord who punished the human race at the dawn of time and sentenced us to captivity under Satan.
 2. Satan cannot touch us without God’s permission (Job 1:12; 2:6).
 3. While Satan is God’s enemy, God can use Satan to be his instrument of punishment against those who reject him.
- E. All this leads us therefore to the one inescapable conclusion:
—*The only way that anyone can be free from the Evil One is for God himself to pardon them and set them free.*

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Romans 5, how did death spread to all mankind? Was it primarily because each human being sinned against God? Or was it due to Adam’s

original sin? (2) According to Hebrews 2:14, who has the power of death? (3) Given (a) that the punishment of sin is death, and (b) that death is in the hands of the devil, how did the human race end up as captives of the Evil One? (4) If God was the One who sentenced our race to captivity under Satan, who alone can set us free?

VI. The Freedom Proclamation

How do God and the Lord Jesus Christ set the captives free?

- A. According to Isaiah 61:1, God through Christ frees captive sinners by *proclaiming* “liberty to the captives,” and “the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”
—To proclaim is a verbal act, an official declaration that creates a new situation.
- B. Consider marriage: When a man and a woman stand before a legal representative to get married, they are *pronounced* husband and wife.
 - 1. Before this pronouncement is made, the man and woman are simply girlfriend and boyfriend.
 - 2. After the pronouncement is made, a new legal situation is created.
 - 3. The happy couple are no longer just girlfriend and boyfriend—they are husband and wife, and therefore entitled to all the privileges as well as responsibilities that come with that new status.
 - 4. The legal pronouncement changes things.
- C. Thus, in the same way, the *pronouncement* or *proclamation* of God’s appointed King changes the status of the captives.
 - 1. More specifically, it changes the legal status of the captives in relation to their captors as well as their relation to God himself.
 - 2. In relation to God, the proclamation creates a new relationship of reconciliation.
 - a. The proclamation brings with it a forgiveness of sins and a restoration of the sinners’ relationship to God.
 - b. God no longer considers them under punishment.
 - c. God now considers them pardoned and in right standing with him.
 - 3. In relation to the captors, the proclamation creates a new relationship also—a relationship of separation and emancipation.
 - a. Whereas the prisoner’s relationship to God is healed, the prisoner’s relationship to the captor is broken.
 - b. Israel does not need to be enslaved to Babylon, Greece, Rome, or Satan any longer.
 - c. Now that God has pardoned their sins, the people of God are free to defy the Evil One and live as God’s holy servants in the world.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What has God sent his Anointed One to do? (2) Based on Isaiah 53:4-6, how does God’s Anointed One deal with our sadness? (3) How has King Jesus begun to remove all the other barriers to our eternal joy? How will you begin living in freedom?

VII. Christ Jesus, the Proclaimer of Liberty

- A. Our Lord Christ merely speaks the word—proclaims liberty and freedom—and we are freed.
- B. For Christ to be able free the captives by proclamation implies that he has awesome *authority*.
 - 1. Verse 1 reminds us of the source of Christ’s authority:

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me...*

2. Jesus has authority to pronounce freedom to the captives because he has the Spirit of the Lord God.
 3. The fact that the Spirit of the Lord YHWH is upon Jesus means that Jesus has the authority to *speak* and *act* on behalf of God.
- C. So our freedom is traced back to God himself.
—Just as God has authority to *punish* the whole human race for their sins, God also has authority to *pardon* the whole human race for their sins.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Christ merely speaks the word and sinners are freed from captivity. What does this imply about Christ’s authority? (2) Go back to the first two lines in 61:1. Who is the source of Christ’s authority?

VIII. Christ Jesus, the Ransom for Our Debts

- A. However, for our liberation to be grounded in reality, something substantial has to be done.
1. If mankind is enslaved to the evil powers because of our debt to justice, our debt has to be paid off before we can be freed—God himself, the supreme Lord of all, has to be satisfied.
 2. Therefore, just as Jesus himself is the good news that he proclaims, Jesus himself is the payment for our freedom.
- B. The truth that Jesus himself is the payment for our sins sits at the heart of the New Testament.
1. Our Lord says in Matthew 20:28: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
—The word for “ransom” is *lutron*, a price that is paid to free a slave.
 2. In 1 Timothy 2:5-6, Paul picks up on this teaching: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all...”
 - a. Here, the word for “ransom” is *antilutron*, something that is given in exchange for another.
 - b. While the idea is slightly different from Matthew 20:28, the basic idea is still the same.
—Our Lord Jesus himself is the payment, the something that was given, to secure our release from captivity.
- C. Jesus Christ is sufficient payment because he is the perfectly sinless man and the eternal Son of God.
—His infinitely worthy life can serve as a perfect compensation to God for all the damages that we have done to his Name and to one another (see Heb 9:14).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What did Christ do to ground our liberation? (2) What do Matthew 20:28 and 1 Timothy 2:5-6 teach about the nature of Christ’s work? (3) “Our Lord Jesus himself is the payment, the something that was given, to secure our release from captivity.” Discuss. (4) Why is Jesus Christ sufficient payment to God for to secure our release?

IX. Ah, the Joy of Gospel Liberty!

- A. What is the result of having our sins washed away by Jesus’ blood?
—Isaiah 53:10: “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with *singing*; everlasting *joy* shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain *gladness* and *joy*, and *sorrow* and *sighing* shall flee away.”
- B. Why does Paul consider joy one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22)?

1. Because joy is the result of freedom from captivity.
2. 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”
3. When God sets us free, there is no longer any reason to remain sad or poor. —God has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the result of being ransomed by Jesus’ blood? How does Isaiah 53:10 describe the experience of our salvation? (2) Why is joy one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit? See 2 Corinthians 3:17.

X. Guarding Our Liberty in Christ

- A. Assuming that we have put our trust in Jesus; assuming that we depend on his self-sacrifice to completely pay for our sins and reconcile us to God, what is left for us to do?
- B. Because Jesus is the Anointed One of God who has set us free, our freedom cannot be lost.
- C. That said, our own personal experience of that freedom can change. —Even though the prison gates have been broken and our captors have been overpowered by a higher authority, you and I can still live *as if* we were still in prison.
- D. Consider the experience of soldiers returning from a war zone.
 1. These soldiers have been at war for so long that they have trouble adjusting to normal civilian life.
 2. They have lived in fear and combat for so long that they need help returning to normal civilian life.
- E. The Christian life is something like. —While you and I have been reconciled to God, it can be hard getting used to our newfound freedom.
- F. While we were captives, the most dominant mode of thinking is *fear*.
 1. We feared death.
 2. Because we feared death, we lived as if this world was the only reality worth living for.
 3. We lived with addictions, careerism, self-centeredness, and worship of pleasure.
- G. Satan can exploit our fears and lead us to lose ourselves in all kinds of meaningless distractions. He makes us live for the less important things.
- H. A great challenge of the Christian life is to live as free people. —Galatians 5:1: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”
- I. What is the yoke of slavery in your life today? How does fear continue to show in your life?
 1. Fear may show in your addiction to pleasure and sinful habits.
 2. Fear may show in addiction to work and career.
 3. Fear may show in an inability and unwillingness to relate to others.
 4. Fear may show in the weakness in our habits of prayer.
 - a. You don’t flee to God eagerly because you secretly doubt the goodness of God.
 - b. Although you are a child of God, you still relate to God as a slave.
 - c. You relate to God only when you have sins to confess, or when you need something from him.
 - d. The whole irony of this fearful, slavish-attitude toward God is that it ends up putting unnecessary distance between you and the Father.
 - i. Because you don’t freely run to God, you are an easy target for your former master.

- ii. You fearfulness weakens your spiritual life and effectiveness for the Kingdom.
 - iii. As a result, you still think and act in captive terms—you are little different from the secular people of the world.
- J. Whatever form your fear takes; whatever sinful behavior your fear generates, the Anointed One of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, has set you free.
—You don't have to settle for mediocrity—you can live fully for the Kingdom of God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) “Because Jesus is the Anointed One of God who has set us free, the good news is that our freedom cannot be lost.” Discuss. (2) What does it mean that “our personal experience of that freedom can change”? (3) Can you see how ungodly fear plays a role in your thinking and decision-making? How does the old fear of death look like in your life? How does it interfere with your life of trust in Christ? (4)

XI. “The Liberty Which Christ Hath Purchased...”

Speaking of Christian Liberty, Westminster Confession 20:1 reads:

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists [1] in their freedom from [a] the guilt of sin, [b] the condemning wrath of God, [c] the curse of the moral law; and, [2] **in their being delivered** from [a] this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; [b] from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, [3] **in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him**, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind.

Through Jesus Christ, the exile has finally come to an end, both for Israel and for the world. God has pardoned our sins. God has set us free from Satan and his powers. It is now time to come out of jail and return to God, and to what he has called us to be—his holy priesthood, his royal nation on earth. Don't live a mediocre life. Seek first the Kingdom and all things will be added to you (Mt 6:33). Give glory to your Lord and Savior. “You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men” (1 Cor 7:23). “You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the Confession of Faith teach about Christian freedom? What are the three major elements of our Christian freedom according to the Westminster Confession?