



Happy New Year! As you know, today is the first day of 2017. There is something about the start of a new year that I enjoy. The new year brings new goals, resolutions, the hope of change, a fresh start. I often feel like the new year brings a clean slate. And after 2016 don't we all feel the need for a clean slate and a new hope?

In our short Christmas series we've been answering the question, "What child is this?" This morning we will discover that this child, Jesus, will grow up and become a man who will be the proclaimer of hope and purpose not only to His people but to you and me as well.

The Servant of God to Come

Before we dive into our passage in Isaiah, let me remind you about a few things and give you some context to these verses. First, Isaiah was a prophet of God to Israel and Judah for about 60 years. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah the prophet called the nation to repent and renew their relationship with God. By 721 BC Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity, leaving the tribes of Judah to defend themselves alone against their enemies. During this time Isaiah writes chapters 40–66 which would provide God's people with a message of hope, comfort, and forgiveness by the coming Messiah. When Isaiah gets to chapter 61, he is describing the person and the ministry of the coming Messiah as well as the blessing He will bring upon the faithful remnant of Judah.

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim 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, to
proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn, (Is. 61:1–2)**

The person of the Messiah

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me.... (v. 1).**

This "anointed one" is the Messiah, the one who was to be born of a virgin and was to be called Immanuel (Isa. 7:14), the Sovereign Lord, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, and Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:6) It would be the Messiah that would serve His people as well as the Gentiles. He would be the gift of salvation to the whole world. And as we can see right here in this verse the Holy Spirit will be with Him and God the Father has anointed Him for a purpose. What is that purpose?

The ministry of the Messiah

....to proclaim 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,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

and the day of vengeance of our God,

to comfort all who mourn, (verses 1b–2).

Isaiah goes into an excellent description of the purpose the Messiah would have. These words would have given hope to the remnant of Israelites. The Israelites needed the hope and purpose of the Messiah described in these verses—to hear good news, to be healed from broken hearts, to be released from their prisoners, to celebrate the year of Jubilee or the Lord's favor, to know that God would have His day and to be comforted from the many losses they experienced. These words would give them hope to go on as a captured and conquered people. These words would give them encouragement to continue to be faithful. The Messiah would bring good news, healing, freedom, comfort, and release. These words are words of restoration. Through the Messiah, they would be made new. Through this Messiah Jesus we are made new! Have you ever restored something? Made it new?

I love to take old furniture and make it new. Since I was in high school, I have been refinishing furniture. I've refinished tables, chairs, dining sets, the executive table in the library, cabinets and recently my bed and dresser. The thing about refinishing furniture is it takes time, pressure and precision. You have to sand and strip the old paint or stain off the furniture. It needs to be done down to the bare wood! This is the hardest part of the process. It's hard work. You have to get into the nooks and crannies because if you don't, it will show through the new paint or

stain. Once you are down to the bare wood, you have to take some fine grit sand paper and sand your piece of furniture until it's silky smooth.

Now the fun part begins! You get to put on the new stain. Different kinds of wood react to stain and paint differently. Once you've got the first coat of stain down, you carefully sand the wood until it's silky smooth, then another coat of stain! Sand it again to get all the roughness off and now for the tedious part, the clear coat. The clear coat is hard because you want to make sure you don't have any brush marks. Guess what you do next? Sand it down and add another clear coat! New hardware and voila, an old piece of furniture made new!

In a lot of ways, this is what the Messiah would come to do, not only for the Israelites but you and me as well. Being made new is a lot like refinishing furniture. Jesus takes us as we are, but He is not going to leave us that way. He refines us, sands down the rough and splintery parts of us. He redeems those broken parts of our lives. Restoration is tedious, often difficult and sometimes painful. But these words, the purpose of the Messiah Jesus, is what gave hope to the Israelites and gives us hope and purpose in this world.

If we fast forward 600-700 years we see the prophecy fulfilled in Luke 4:16-21.

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘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 for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then 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. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”

The Servant of God Who Has Come

Don't these words sound familiar? Here in this passage, Jesus comes to his hometown. We find out that news about Him is spreading, His teaching is gaining popularity, and people are intrigued by His words. He is in his hometown synagogue where he grew up, and He reads the very same passage we just read in Isaiah with a couple of lines left out. People who were worshipping at the synagogue would know those words and Jesus got their attention by omitting them. What did He omit? “The

day of vengeance of our God.” Jesus was making something very clear. He was letting those who were listening know that the year of the Lord's favor was here and being fulfilled and that God's vengeance would come another day. Now I want to dive into the year of the Lord's favor, but before I do that, let's talk about who Jesus was talking to.

Every good teacher knows their target audience. When a teacher knows their audience, they can custom tailor the application of the teaching to their audience. For just about 30 years, my target audience has been 5th grade to young adults. That's a pretty wide range. A 5th grader is a lot different than an 8th grader, and they are a lot different from a twenty-two-year-old! Today, I have a different target. Obviously, we have a broad range of ages here; I guess most of you attend CPC on a regular basis and I guess many of you here today came to church because it was on your list of resolutions! So because of that, I'm trying to target my message to that crowd. Jesus did the same thing. His target audience were the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. These are the people that Jesus came to seek and to save and to serve. And believe it or not, we have each of those types of people sitting here today.

Jesus came to proclaim hope to the poor

As the passage tells us, Jesus was anointed to preach the good news to the poor. I would guess most of us in this room wouldn't define ourselves as poor financially. Let me remind you that we do happen to live in one of the most expensive places on the planet. Although we may feel poor because of it, Jesus is emphasizing spiritual poverty. The Greek word here for poor (*pah-toe-hose*) is the same word Jesus used in the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” To be poor in spirit literally means to grovel or crouch like a beggar. It describes a person who has nothing at all. Jesus is saying, “Blessed are the beggars in Spirit.” Blessed are those who, when it comes to God, know they have nothing to offer and can do nothing but beg.

The poor are especially open to Jesus' teaching and often see it as good news. The wealthy don't see a need to have a savior with their misplaced trust in themselves and their money. This was all too real for me within my family. My mom was an avid prayer warrior, and for 18 years we prayed for my grandfather to come to know Jesus. He was a self-made man. He had the American dream: a nice home, a family, a pool in the backyard, he was good with money, and he had lots of good friends. By his standards, he was rich and didn't see the need for a savior. In his mind, he had it all until his health was stripped away from him through the ravages of ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. This strong, self-made man lost all function of his body including the ability

to speak. It was only then did he understand what it meant to be poor in spirit and gave his life to Christ.

Jesus came to proclaim hope to the captives

Just like the word “poor,” the word “captives” has a spiritual meaning. For the folks who would listen to Isaiah, it literally meant prisoners of war. But for Jesus’ audience and ours it would mean forms of spiritual bondage. We can be in bondage to money, to hate, to power, to guilt, to grades, to success, to getting into the right college. Because of Jesus and His good news, He breaks the power of sin and bondage and gives us freedom. Is there something that has a hold on your life? That keeps you a prisoner?

Jesus came to proclaim hope to the blind

Not only did Jesus heal the blind physically, but He also came to give sight to the blind spiritually. We all are spiritually blind at some point. Until we get to the point in our lives that we accept Jesus as our savior, we walk around in spiritual darkness. It’s when we open our eyes to Jesus we can truly see. I love it when Jesus opens the eyes of Saul, who would then become Paul and tells him this in Acts 26:17b-18: *“I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”*

Jesus came to proclaim hope to the oppressed

The idea here behind the word oppressed is crushed or shattered in pieces. Have you been crushed by your circumstance? Has your life been shattered into pieces? Jesus wants to pick up those pieces and set you free, make you whole and make you new.

Jesus came to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor

The year of the Lord’s favor, otherwise known as the Year of Jubilee, was an amazing thing in Jewish culture. Every 50 years the slate was wiped clean. They were released from all debt and enemies, slaves were freed, land was given back to its rightful owner. The day that Jesus stood in the synagogue and proclaimed the year of the Lord’s favor was the day that changed everything. We no longer have to be slaves to sin, we have freedom from fear of sin and death. It was the day God granted salvation not only to His people but all of us. It’s the day of restoration, the day that you and I were given a clean slate.

What Child is this? He is the proclaimer of hope and purpose. We see Jesus’ purpose, but what about ours? We are called to be like Jesus, a proclaimer of hope. Our purpose as a church and as an individual are the same. He wants to use each of us in our sphere of influence to serve not only the poor but the poor in spirit, to bring hope to those in bondage to sin and help them understand they can be free through Jesus, to bring hope to those who are

walking in spiritual darkness or blindness and bring them the light of Jesus, and to serve the oppressed, those whose lives have been shattered into pieces, knowing that Jesus will pick up those pieces and make all things new.

Last year, little did I know that I would be going to my last Youth Workers Convention. Many of you in this room have attended those with me through the years. It was there I met Amy. She is a self-proclaimed “Hope Dealer.” She is someone that is a proclaimer of hope and purpose. She works with inner city kids, mostly gang members in inner-city Chicago. Amy has held kids’ hands as they die from gunshots, she has visited kids she has poured her life into on the streets who are now in prison, she has helped kids jump out of gangs and has tried to prevent kids from jumping into gangs. She calls herself the “Hope Dealer.” She brings the hope of Jesus Christ to a place that seems like it has no hope. This is her description of a “Hope Dealer.”

A HOPE DEALER understands that you can’t judge a book by its cover, but you also can’t judge a book by its first chapter. Whatever that first chapter is, we need to help people close that chapter and then begin again! (Father Boyle)

A HOPE DEALER believes in the possibility and potential of every person, no matter what it looks like... because the Hope Dealer themselves are counting on that same hope.

A HOPE DEALER is willing to go where needed (where most fear to go), do what it takes to be a light in a person’s darkness. Drug dealers do! So why do we shrink at the thought of reaching out to the same people?

A HOPE DEALER doesn’t just deal hope but walks life with these people as the hope manifests itself in their heart, mind, and path.

But mostly, A HOPE DEALER knows hope and peace can only be found in, through and from God – not in anything we can do or say. Our hope is that we are forgiven, we are loved, and we have a purpose that only we can fulfill.

A HOPE DEALER understands that, until a someone is ready, WE are the example of Christ’s chase-them-down-pursuing-them-at-all-costs kind of love.

Will you be a proclaimer of hope and purpose, a “Hope Dealer?” There are a lot of “hope dealers” right in this room! I think of Angela who has stuck with our high school kids through thick and thin and at times has been the only leader who has stayed plugged into our high school kids. I think of Fred who goes out each month to serve the poor with his community group. I think of Steve and Wendy who drive women from the shelters they live in to attend our Higher Power service. I think of Jen who counsels people year in and year out through biblical counseling. Or Jeanne who sits with first graders every week and teaches

them about the hope of Jesus. I think of Mike who proclaims the hope of Jesus through his business deals.

We all are proclaimers of hope and purpose. I want to challenge us as we enter this new year, that we take a look at our resolutions and goals with fresh eyes in light of our passages today. We have a clean slate to do something different with our resolutions and goals. I'm sure most of us have many of the same things we try to resolve to do year after year: lose weight, get out of

debt, be nice to my sibling, get better grades. Those things aren't necessarily wrong or bad, but eternally do they really matter? Instead, let's resolve to be a proclaimer of hope and purpose in Jesus, bringing His hope and purpose to the poor, to the prisoners, to the blind and the oppressed.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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