

“Whom would you like most to hear Good News?”

Isaiah 61:1-8 NIV

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“(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.

Strangers 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 your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.

8 “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.”

We usually think of prophets as experts in predicting the future.

Most of the prophecies you hear today (2-3-19) are Super Bowl prognostications.

We shall see who the accurate forecasters are later this evening.

The part of prophetic work that gets most of our attention is foretelling.

In the Bible, though, foreseeing the future was only a portion of a prophet’s work.

A significant share of a prophet’s job was reminding folks of God’s laws and urging them to obey God.

Prophets wrote major parts of their books after folks had disobeyed God.

“You did not obey God, so here are the consequences you will suffer.”

Prophecy often resembles the verbal exchanges between parents and children.

My brother Don had in his possession bundles of letters our mother received during her adult life—perhaps all of them.

Don died last June.

Norma and I recently obtained much of her correspondence, which we have been reviewing and rerouting appropriately.

My mother apparently kept every letter that Norma and I, and everyone else, sent her.

I happened across several letters and notes we sent during the illness which ended her life at 91 years.

In one note, I asked if she remembered the day in Kansas, when I was about 7-8 years old; she chased me down the driveway, switch in hand, calling me a “little imp.**”¹**

My parents were both loving and honest, but they expected obedience from us.

We kids understood the consequences of disobedience.

It didn’t take a gifted foreseer to know what would happen because of my devilish actions.

At seven years of age, I utterly understood that aspect of my future.

The Pentateuch (the 5 books of Moses) clearly states God’s warnings to Israel about not keeping his laws.

Leviticus 26:14-46 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68 solemnly forewarned Israel.

Here is a sample:

“If you do not listen to me or obey all these commands, 15 and if you break my covenant by rejecting my decrees, treating

¹Months ago I mentioned this incident in a sermon ago never dreaming at the time that I would come across a reference to it in a letter I wrote circa 1993.

my regulations with contempt, and refusing to obey my commands, 16 I will punish you. I will bring sudden terrors upon you—wasting diseases and burning fevers that will cause your eyes to fail and your life to ebb away. . . Those who hate you will rule over you, and you will run even when no one is chasing you!”²

Israel faced these consequences of disobeying.

Disobeying God results in misery for us and those around us.

Obedience brings contentment, harmony, and peace.

Israel rejected God’s commands and brought dire circumstances on themselves.

My “little imp” behavior did not create a happy day.

Mom never got close enough to effectively use her switch.

But I was a lonesome, hungry, miserable, fearful, polecat a good part of the day; I ran to the end of the block.

Once I thought it was safe to come back, I sneaked home via the alley. That switch incident occurred about 75 years ago, but the memories are fresher than the aromas of this morning’s coffee.

Why talk about this childhood incident?

People of all ages and backgrounds are now deciding they do not need God:

- they think it unnecessary to worship Him;
- they don’t want to disrupt their pleasure;
- there’s no need to honor Him;
- they are too busy for God.

Sports, computer games, greed, pleasure, and iPads are the gods of this age.

Does anyone in society, in the media, in politics, and in churches see the connection between folks giving up honoring God and the glut of anger, greed, depression, drug addiction, and finger-pointing now ripping entire countries?

Current music often agitates with rage or gushes tears of heartbreak and dismay.

² Leviticus 26:14-17 New Living Translation

Don used to quote the lyrics of a country song that went: “I’ve got tears in my ears from lying in my bed crying over you.”

Despair, mourning, and broken hearts are not unique to our time.

When folks rebel against God, they prevail.

Isaiah described Israel’s misery.

Yet in the midst of gloomy dejection, the bad news suddenly changed:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news . . .”

Imagine a network newscaster reversing his/her usual dreary reports and telling you good news and more good news.

On every subject, pleasant news erupts.

That is the gist of Isaiah’s report.

Isaiah was not speaking of himself.

If Isaiah didn’t refer to himself, whom did he have in mind?

Fast-forward from 700 BC and go to the city of Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown.

Jesus began preaching in some towns along the Sea of Galilee; then:

“He 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. (17) The 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 . . .”³

About 700 years after Isaiah, Jesus returned to his hometown, entered the synagogue where he always attended.

Men could stand up and volunteer to read, and the synagogue ruler gave Jesus the Isaiah scroll.

The scroll could have been 25’ long.

Imagine those worshipers waiting for Jesus to unroll the scroll all the way to chapter 61.

³ Luke 4:16-19 NIV

Ever wait for a reader who fumbled trying to find Bible chapter and verse?

Chapter and verse divisions hadn't been put in the Bible in Jesus' time.

Scrolls had to be unrolled on one side and then rolled up on the other.

Jesus read our text and then said: “*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*”

What did Jesus mean and what does the text tell us?

We human beings create terrible messes.

At times we purposely err.

Sometimes we commit accidental mistakes; we don't intend it to end badly, but it does.

Life often turns out that way.

We and our loved ones suffer broken hearts.

I have officiated at hundreds of funerals for those whose loved ones thought them saints.

I've also conducted miserably sad funerals.

One of the gloomiest was at a Southern California cemetery known as Valhalla.⁴

⁴ Valhalla is a Norse word for “hall of the slain” brought there by Valkyries (in Germanic myth, Odin's daughters or attendants). They came to the battlefield, chose

Prior to the burial, the deceased's well-dressed two daughters openly cried by her casket.

One of them forlornly uttered:

“Wherever you are, mom, I hope you are happy.”

Many people are filled with regret and despondency to the point of despair, not just at funerals.

We usually get in this condition because we ignore God or His will.

That's why the world is in a mess.

Jesus not only promised to cure the problem, he is the cure.

He guarantees the results.

May I ask you a few questions?

- **If you knew that someone will definitely deal with all of the crooks, criminals, kidnappers, liars, and murderers would you rest easier and be happier?**

those who were to die and bore them back to Valhalla. Chief among them was Brynhild. Odin is a Norse name for the chief Germanic god. Source: *Columbia Desk Encyclopedia*. “Valhalla” is an odd name for a Christian burial place.

- **If you knew that someone had covered all of your mistakes, whether you made them purposely or accidentally, would you sleep better tonight?**
- **If you knew that that same person had come back from the dead and guarantees that if you believe in him and trust him, he will bring you back from your grave, would you feel freer and less anxious?**

Jesus:

- 1. “binds up the brokenhearted,”**
- 2. releases us from darkness . . . ,**
- 3. Brings gladness instead of mourning,**
- 4. Surrounds us with “praise instead of a spirit of despair.”**
- 5. And comforts all who mourn,**

Have you taken my challenge to read about Jesus in the NT at least 15 minutes a day?

Turn off your TV or Gameboy, or put down your novel for a while, learn about Jesus, and follow his lead.

You will feel more positive, strong, and encouraged.

Why and how will you feel improved?

- 1. Jesus created us and knows our needs.**
- 2. He alone came back from the dead never to die again;**
- 3. He will bring “the day of vengeance” on all wrongdoers, whether preachers, businessmen, politicians, farmers, etc.**

One of our greatest needs is to be free of guilt.

Even few professionals seem to recognize that much of the depression and despondency folks feel today is connected to unresolved guilt that troubles them.

The depressing darkness many feel relates to things they have done wrong or are doing for which they have attained no forgiveness.

Jesus taught us to act according to God’s will.

If we violate God’s commands, we find healing by quitting the wrongs, by confessing them, and making amends wherever possible.

When Norma and I first began our ministry in Hollywood, we were still impressed some by the Hollywood scene.

Once when my parents were visiting, someone gave us four tickets to the taping of the Joey Bishop television show. My parents agreed to babysit for us. A young couple had arranged to go with Norma and me, but had to cancel shortly before it was time to leave for the program. We called several friends to see if they could go with us. None could go on that short notice. My mom always enjoyed events such as that and said: **“I would like to go.”** I did not want her to go and refused to even hear her desire to attend.

Later I felt great guilt for my rudeness. It worked on me for years. Sometime later, after my dad died, I visited mom. I confessed what I had done to her on that occasion and asked her forgiveness.

Can you guess what she said about the event that had so troubled my conscience?

“I don’t even remember it, Bob,” she replied. Her forgiveness lifted a huge burden from me.

The Lord promises to forgive and remove our sins from us: “as far as the east is from the west.”⁵

The world needs to hear this great news. When people believe and take advantage of this Good News, much of the darkness they experience will end.

But we must quit our wrong, confess to the person we have wronged, and do our best to not repeat the offense.

God bless us as we do God’s will and follow Jesus.

See below for the handout Bob gave to each person who attended last Sunday:

My Notes _____
“Whom would you like most to hear Good News?”

⁵ Psalm 103:12

Isaiah 61:1-8 NLT

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rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours. 8 “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.”



On right in this photo: Jessie Blair (Bob's mother) at about 15 years of age with her friend Elizabeth and the donkey Jessie rode to school at the time. About 25 years later, she chased Bob down the driveway of their Kansas home switch-in-hand.



A not-so-innocent Bob in baggy pants about 1944, approximate time of the “switch” incident.

Leviticus 26: 14-17 New Living Translation

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Luke 4:16-19 NIV

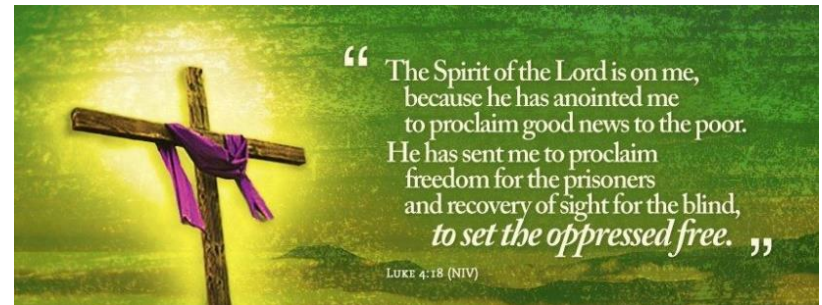
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If you have been feeling like this, take the challenge to read the Good News about Jesus in the New Testament at least 15 minutes a day and encourage someone else every day.



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