

Total Makeover

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end

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Maybe you like the same type of TV programs that I love, where a poor and needy family gets a complete makeover of their house. It is emotion-tv, a bit cheesy, but I love it.

Often the family that gets help is facing some big problems; they have a handicapped child, they have struggled with disease, and their house is truly a ruin.

In come the builders. Together with the neighbours they work their heart out and in a week or two, a completely rebuilt and redecorated house is created.

In the end the owners of the house are allowed to come and see. They say ohhh and ahhh and in the American versions of the programs they hug and cry. In the British versions the people who get the new house usually respond with restraint, but the wow factor is always great.

The mess of their house, is no more.
Everything is new. Bigger, nicer, perfect.
Mourning is changed into dancing.

And is that not the hope that we have for our life, even for our world? The total makeover?

Isaiah wrote about this. People were mourning the ruins of their cities, but they were told to look forward to the rebuilding and the renewal of their lives.



1. About Christ

The second part of Isaiah, the chapters 40-66, was written when Israel was in exile in Babylon; the context of the promises to Israel was that Israel was not in its own land, that land was destroyed, and the people of God desired to return and to rebuild their land, their cities, their temple.

In Isaiah 61 the prophet promised restoration to the Israelites who were mourning in exile at the rivers of Babylon. Isaiah said, in beautiful, poetic words,

They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;

they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

That was a fantastic promise to the people of God in exile. Just as once, Israel was led by God in an exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, God would once again lead them in an exodus to that land, now from Babylon.

Those people did indeed return to their land, and they did rebuilt the cities, but when they did, it was also very clear, that the restoration was not complete at all.

They were still ruled over by others, the land was full of injustice, and most problematic, God had not returned to the temple that Israel rebuilt for him. God had not come back to his people.

One time, when Jesus was asked to preach in the synagogue. He followed the normal lectionary, so He had to read exactly this passage from Isaiah 61:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners.

Jesus then told the people: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus claimed that Isaiah spoke of Him, and in his life He fulfilled those words of Isaiah.

Jesus suggested that He was the anointed one who was to inaugurate the perfect life for God’s people; to give them a complete makeover.

He brings us into the perfect land of God, into paradise where God is in the land, where all things will be wonderful and where we are fully restored, rebuild, where we get a total makeover.



Luke in his Gospel speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus as a new exodus. He is the one who leads us out of our misery into the promised land of milk and honey.

The Apostle Paul wrote similarly about what Christ did for us. In his letter to the Corinthians, St Paul compares our baptism with how Israel began its first exodus by going through the waters of the Red Sea.

Paul compares our Christian life with how Israel travelled 40 years through the desert, with Jesus Christ who always helped them.

And we also look forward to our entry into the promised land, when God will renew our world. This year we have been extra aware of the imperfection of our present life.

2. In exile

The Israelites in the time of Jesus were actually told by Jesus and the apostles: yes you are right, God never returned to his people, we were still in exile, but all this has now changed. In a very unexpected way, through Jesus, God has come to save his people.

And with Jesus, we are now on the way through the desert. The true exodus was not the one from Egypt, it was not the return of Israel from Babylon, but it is what Jesus has finally done for his people.



He is the beginning of the final and complete makeover; He created a bridgehead of the coming promised land in us, in those who follow him to that promised land.

But we are not in that promised land yet. St Peter, in his first letter, underlines this. He begins that letter with these words: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."

The Christians he wrote to, and we, we are 'elect exiles of the Dispersion.' We are elect, because God chose us, just as He adopted Israel as his Son when He led them out of Egypt.

So He also chose you, to take you out of your own Egypt, or Babylon, to lead you to his promised land.

But we are at the same time still exiles. We have not arrived yet. God chose us, we belong to Him, but we are now in the desert, in a world that resists our Lord Jesus Christ. We are strangers in a strange land.

We can never settle too comfortably in the world we live in. The world as such is God's creation, but the people, and our cultures, do not reflect the values of God. But you want to live a godly life. And that clashes. We are exiles in the diaspora.

And therefore, the sorrows that Isaiah describes, the sorrows of Israel in exile, are in many respects also our sorrows.

Isaiah speaks of people who feel oppressed, broken-hearted, captives, prisoners. As Christians we do not escape from heart break. I would argue that we who have tasted something of the good God, and of the life that is coming, experience the tragedy of this present life even stronger than those who do not believe.

God is a comforter, yes, that is his character. But this means that there are people who need that comfort. And that's us.

God comforts us again and again, but that makes us feel even more that we are presently away from the Lord, in a strange land. Those are words of St Paul. We walk by faith, not by sight.

And if we feel away from the Lord, He comes to comfort us again. Is this not the Christian life, with its ups and downs?

Because we know something of the beauty of God, the beauty of his heavenly temple, the beauty of the world to come, everything around us feels to a certain extent like the ruins that the people of Israel remembered after the destruction of their land.

Our churches in the Western world, does it not often feel as if we look at their ruins? We still remember their strength, their impact on society, their attraction.

But we are people of hope and we hold fast to the promises of Isaiah. The ruins of Zion will be rebuilt. Maybe different than how it used to be, but God builds his church. He still has great plans for us.

And eventually, the New Jerusalem will fill this world, and it shall be filled with his glory. In these days of Advent, we look forward to that.

3. Righteous people

This year we had enough misery around us, and if we look back on 2020, it is easy to see it as a lost year. How different it is if we purposely see it as a year of waiting for God, and of expecting.

Christ says in Isaiah that He is anointed by the Spirit of God to bind up broken hearted. He repairs hearts.

And He came to comfort those who mourn in Zion, to give them the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

Now that is what we need! Jesus is anointed and He anoints us with oil. For gladness. He envelopes our faint spirit with his mantle of praise.

Instead of staring at our problems, we look at God and we praise Him.

We begin with sadness and mourning over the ruins of our work, our church, our life. And if we mourn in the presence of Jesus Christ, He supplies us with the joy that we desire.

Even in the midst of darkness and destruction, Jesus gives us his oil of gladness. The Holy Spirit in our life, can do amazing things. Just ask Him.

But. But the salvation that the Gospel speaks about is not just to make us glad. That is wonderful, but not what we should be focussed on.

You know what Jesus said about not worrying about food and drinks and all that: 'seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Isaiah says of the people of Christ:
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

The happiness we desire in our exiled life, is available if we begin with being known as oaks of righteousness and as people of praise - of the glory of God.

So the work of God in us, begins with a focus on others, and on God, and not on ourselves.

If in darkness and problems we need hope for the future, that is what we must do today.

Even in our exile we choose to be known as righteous people by our life style. We choose to live for the praise of God. Because He gives us his Spirit, this is possible. We can live a life of righteousness.

We can get the makeover we personally need. Surely, now is just a beginning, later to be completed.

There is much rebuilding to be done. In our personal life. In our church.

Also in our world.

We are people who should build. God calls us to make new what is damaged.

After this year of Corona - even our regular church life needs rebuilding. We must build again, maybe different here and there. Things will not be the same, even in the year ahead.



But instead of stare at the ruins, with the presence of Jesus Christ, we have the vocation and the power to rebuild.

Conclusion

If we choose to be people of righteousness, people who live for others and for the honor of God, then He promises to give us all comfort we need to live our lives in exile.

You are the chosen of God. Those whom He took out of Egypt, our of Babylon, and He takes you through the desert to the Promised Land.

In the desert we presently live in, He teaches us to be constructive people. People who build up, and not tear down.

His total makeover has begun, in your life. So be intentional about it.

You have to ask yourself: in the past year, have I been building up, or tearing down?

And in the year ahead, what shall I do? Where can I do my construction work for the Kingdom of God? How can I be a builder.

+Amen