Last week, in Isaiah 9:1-7, we saw how the Lord was about to bring judgment on Judah. Instead of trusting in the Lord as their God and their Protector, they had turned to Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, the captain of the armies of Israel, for their protection. As a result, the Lord said that He was going to bring the armies of Assyria into Syria and Israel and sweep them all away. But He wasn’t going to stop there. The floodwaters of the Euphrates would also flow into Judah, until it reached up to their necks, fill the breadth of their land, and also took them away into captivity. Times were dark. It looked as if there wasn’t any hope. But in the middle of this darkness, the Lord promised light; He gave them a ray of hope. He was going to return them to the land. He was going to restore their captivity. And He was going to raise up the Messiah, the One who would preach good news to them, the One who was coming so that there would be good news.

Our passage this evening is set in the same context. Judah was still destined for exile, because they had broken the covenant. But again the Lord gives them another ray of hope; He preaches the Gospel to them. Even though they would be bound and imprisoned by a foreign nation, yet the Lord was going to raise up a prophet to bring glad tidings of good news. In those days, it was Isaiah. He says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted” (v. 1).

His message was a message of comfort that even though their exile was certain, yet it wouldn’t be permanent. But this passage and its promise go far beyond the situation Israel would soon find herself in. The exile is a very apt picture of the spiritual situation that God’s people were in when Messiah came. He was the Prophet the Lord sent to them in order to bring this same good news of comfort and freedom. Isaiah here points beyond himself to the Messiah and the ministry He would have in Israel and in the days beyond His earthly ministry through His church.

Having seen something already of the prophetic office of Christ, this evening, I would like for us to focus on the effects of Christ’s ministry, effects that are mainly positive and saving, the same effects that His Gospel brings today, when He is pleased to bless it. What I want us to see is that God has given us comfort, freedom and the power to live a righteous life through the Gospel – through the work, that is, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First, we need to recognize that this is, in fact, a prophecy about the ministry of Jesus Christ. We read in Luke’s Gospel that when He came to Nazareth, the town in which He was raised, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, “and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.’ And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’”
(Luke 4:16-21). This passage in Isaiah was speaking about Him, and now He was here, doing exactly what Isaiah He would be doing: preaching the Gospel.

But let’s ask a few questions about what’s going on in this passage. First of all, what does it mean that the Father anointed Jesus with the Spirit? This is what the Lord had to do to equip His prophets to preach His Word. The spirit of the prophets, the spirit by which they spoke, was the Spirit of God. He was the One speaking through them. How else would they have known what God’s will was? Paul writes, “Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). When a prophet spoke God’s Word, he always did so by the Spirit. And Peter writes, “For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21). Isaiah was anointed by God to be His spokesman, literally to be His mouth, to speak to His people on His behalf, as we’ve seen before in the case of Moses. Jesus was anointed with the Spirit in the same way, only in His case He was anointed above measure (John 3:34). He is the Son, the One sent to represent God as no one else could (Heb. 1:1-3). The Spirit was His equipping, His source of power, His source of wisdom and knowledge to do this work. And being equipped by the Spirit, the Father sent Him forth. Remember, no one takes the office of a prophet, or any office for that matter, upon himself, but goes only when God sends him. If he goes any other way, he is being presumptuous and opening himself to God’s judgment. Jesus was called by God and anointed by Him for the work He called Him to do.

But what did the Father anoint Him to do? He says, “The Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the afflicted” (v. 1). The Lord sent Him to preach the Gospel, the message of God’s mercy, of His grace, of His forgiveness; the message of reconciliation and peace to those who are at war with Him; the message of everlasting life and escape from judgment; the message of adoption as sons and daughters of God. These are the things that the Gospel brings, which God brings through His Son, the Lord Jesus. But we need to see that here the Messiah is directed by the Lord to preach this Gospel to a specific group of people – not only to those who need it (which is everyone), but to those who sense their need for it, who have been prepared by God to receive it. Isaiah, speaking by the Spirit of Christ, says, “The Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted” (v. 1). In typical Hebrew poetic structure, He is actually saying the same thing twice, only the second time, He gets a little more specific. Christ was sent to preach the Gospel, not to the proud, not to those who think they don’t have any need for it, but to the afflicted, to the humble, to those who see their need, who see their sin and know what the consequences of their sin is and long to be freed from it. He was sent to bind up the hearts of those who mourn for their sins, who long to be freed from them, who want to be strong in the ways of the Lord. This is what the Gospel has the power to do – to heal the heart of the sinner and make it healthy again.

But the Gospel has another effect and that is it has the power to free us from the captivity of Satan. Isaiah, again speaking by the Spirit of Christ, says, “He has sent Me . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to prisoners” (v. 1). We come into this world bound in sin, prisoners of the kingdom of darkness. The people of God were merely imprisoned by the Assyrians, who took them out of the land into the land of Babylon. But the reason why they were taken away was that for the most part they were
captives of the enemy of their souls, the devil. Isaiah was sent to proclaim liberty from
their captivity to Babylon. But Christ was sent to proclaim liberty from their sins. Christ
Jesus, through the Gospel, promises to take away our sins by His own perfect sacrifice
for sin. He shed His blood on the cross to remove our guilt. But by His Spirit, He also
changes our hearts. He changes the nature of our hearts so that we no longer want to sin,
but instead to do what is right. He sets us free from our bondage to sin. By these two
things, He releases us from the kingdom of darkness. The devil can no longer hold us
captive, because he no longer has our hearts. Before, we were his willing slaves. But by
His grace through the Gospel, we now love and belong to Christ.

Christ was anointed with the Spirit and sent into the world to preach the good
news of forgiveness to those who were humbled by their sins and to proclaim freedom to
those who were bound by its power. In other words, He came to proclaim the time of
God’s favor through the Gospel, “the favorable year of the Lord” (v. 2). God’s people
had sinned, and the wages of sin is death. But the Lord sent Christ to proclaim the time
of His clemency, of His mercy, of His pardon for sin. He preached that they could escape
everything they had earned by their sins, if they would only receive Christ, as He offers
Himself to them in His Gospel. It’s interesting that this is where Jesus stops quoting the
Isaiah passage in the synagogue of Nazareth. He doesn’t go any further, because it was
still the time of God’s favor. It was still the time of His mercy. But the time of His
judgment was also near. When Israel began to reject their Messiah, Jesus began to
proclaim God’s judgment against them (Matt. 23-25). For those who wouldn’t receive
Him, He proclaimed “the day of vengeance of our God” (v. 2), the day of the Lord. They
were going to reject and kill His Son, and He was going to send His armies to kill those
murderers and give His vineyard to others who would cultivate it and bring forth its fruits
(Mark 12:9). This is the only negative effect mentioned in this passage regarding the
Gospel. For those who receive it, it brings great blessing. But for those who reject it, it
brings judgment, not only the judgment of A. D. 70, but also what that judgment points
to, the judgment of everlasting fire.

But there are two more blessings here besides forgiveness and freedom from
bondage. He also gives joy and righteousness. Isaiah continues, “He has sent Me . . . to
comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead
of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit
of fainting” (vv. 2-3). Again, for those who are grieved by their sins and mourn their
spiritual condition, He gives comfort, gladness and praise through the Gospel. There is
comfort in the fact that our sins will no longer condemn us and will no longer keep us in
bondage. There is gladness in our new relationship with God, who takes us now to be
His sons and daughters. And there is praise that He puts on our lips, instead of a spirit of
fainting, because He has given us a bright and glorious future in His presence. But there
is also the blessing of righteousness. Isaiah concludes, “So they will be called oaks of
righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (v. 3). The idea of the
oak tree speaks of resoluteness and steadfastness. Oaks of righteousness are those who
bear the fruits of righteousness steadfastly, or those who cling to His Law and keep it.
This is the goal of the preaching of the Gospel, the reason Jesus came into the world – to
redeem a people to Himself who would be zealous of good works. Paul writes to Titus,
“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny
ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present
age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and 
Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every 
lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good 
deeds” (2:11-14). This is what brings glory to the Lord. It’s not when His people 
continue to live in rebellion against His Law, but when they willingly submit to it, 
because they love Him. This is what the Lord Jesus has brought about through the 
Gospel.

People of God, we need to consider what Jesus has done for us this evening 
through the Gospel, if we are believers, if we are humbled and mourn for our sins. He 
has raised us up out of the pit of destruction. He has cleansed us from every spot and 
blemish. He has freed us from the judgment that God owed us for our sins and from the 
power that sin had to command us. We are no longer in bondage to our sins. He has 
brought comfort to our hearts, joy in our new relationship with Him and praise because 
our future is full of hope. And He has established our footsteps in the paths of His 
blessings. If there was ever a reason for us to be thankful, this is it. This is our hope, this 
is our only comfort in life, this is our reason for living. But let’s not forget that this hope 
is the only hope there is for lost souls. Jesus holds this same hope out to everyone who 
will listen to Him and receive Him as Lord and Savior. We need to get this message out 
to them. This is what the Lord has called us to do. The day is coming when the time of 
His favor will be at an end, and then the judgment will come. But before it does, let’s 
pray that the Lord will use us to gather His lost sheep together. Let’s not keep this good 
news to ourselves, but let’s share it with others, so that they might be saved. Love to our 
Lord, to ourselves and to our neighbor dictates that we must. May the Lord give us His 
grace to do so. Amen.