

PLANTING OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (ISA 61.1-4)

Repairing the Ruins || State of the Church 2024

I. REVIEW

- A. We are currently spending three weeks in Isaiah 61.1-4 with the intention of introducing and outlining several burdens the Lord has given our elders for our spiritual family in this coming year.
- B. Through the fall, we consistently talked together of being called by the Lord into a season of *building the house*. This speaks of reorienting our efforts as a spiritual family around pursuing the things of the Lord together as the first pursuit (corporately and individually) as well as seeking to grow in the knowledge of his ways that we might orient our lives around repairing the ruins of things that have been torn down in our cultural and societal moment.
- C. As those who live in times marked by the widespread decay of public morality, the death of institutions, and the growing acceptance of immorality and deception on a global scale, there is a specific need in our moment as the people of God to work to build God's house, our lives, and our families according to God's patterns.
- D. Isaiah 61.1-4 discusses the people of God who will set out to work in repairing the ruined cities and the desolate places. However, this passage does not merely command God's people to set out to do this work. Rather, it provides a portrait of the *type of people* who will be empowered by God's Spirit to engage in such work.
- E. Last week we looked at the anointing that rested upon Jesus to usher in the reign of God's kingdom through the offering of salvation, healing, and deliverance to those who were poor, wounded, and bound in captivity. In fulfilling the promise of Isaiah, Jesus introduced the age in which this anointing is experienced and received by his church.
- F. This passage declares that the *result* of this work of salvation is that the people of God would be called *oaks of righteousness*. This morning we will utilize this metaphor to derive several principles that I pray will frame and guide our labors as a people as we set out to experience God's life-giving grace and as we set out to partner with him in his work of expanding his kingdom throughout the world.
- G. **Goal:** To infuse us with confidence to set out in doing meaningful kingdom work in our own lives, in the lives of others, and in accordance with our calling. I want to do this by looking to God's word to dignify the slow, seemingly insignificant work that we all experience throughout our lives.

II. GOD'S KINGDOM REIGN

- A. The *kingdom of God* is the specific place(s) where God's rule and reign, his dominion, and his kingship are experienced in this world.
- B. Jesus instructed his disciples to orient their labors and their lives toward submitting to, expanding, and experiencing God's kingdom as their first pursuit.

³⁹But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt 6.33)
- C. Jesus also instructed his disciples to regularly pray for the kingdom to be established on the earth as it is in heaven.

⁹Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt 6.9-10)

- D. The Bible is clear that God created mankind to have dominion over all the earth. This was to be expressed through living in intimate communion with God and expanding his rule and reign throughout creation.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..." (Gen 1.26-28)

- E. In sin, Adam abdicated his rightful place of authority, giving Satan legal authority over the world.

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2.1-2)

⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4.4)

- F. In his life and ministry, Jesus ushered in the age of God's kingdom reign by *walking in perfect obedience to the Father*, by *binding the strong man* (the devil), and by *earning his right to be king over the earth through his death and resurrection*.

³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1.32-33)

⁸The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3.8)

⁶And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2.7-11)

⁵Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals. (Rev 5.5)

- G. At his ascension, Jesus was seated at the right hand of God as the king over all creation. He now reigns in power until all his enemies are placed in subjection to him.

¹⁹according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet (Eph 1.19-22)

²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15.25)

- H. Jesus presently expresses his kingdom reign on the earth *through his church*.

³¹seek his kingdom and these things will be added to you. ³²Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12.31-32)

²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1.22-23)

- I. Jesus situates the Great Commission under his receiving all authority in heaven and earth, recasting the "dominion mandate" for his church.

¹⁸All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28.19-20)

III. RIGHT ORIENTED EXPECTATIONS

- A. Many times, we fail to engage meaningful kingdom work within the church because we fail to rightly shape our expectations related to the size, scope, and time involved in such work.
- B. As the people of God, we must be able to hold in tension a *vision for the radical inbreaking of God's kingdom in the life of the church* (a vision for God's fullness at work among his people) with the *reality of the slow, patient expansion of God's kingdom purposes* as outlined in the New Testament.
- C. Many of the parables of Jesus outline the slow, quiet, and even apparently unsuccessful work of ministry as it is experienced in the kingdom of heaven.

¹⁸Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears with word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and another thirty. (Matt 13.18-23)

³¹He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³²It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." ³³He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." (Matt 13.31-33)

- D. These parables demonstrate several things to us:
 - 1. Kingdom work will be "*less successful*" than we imagine. In the parable of the soils, we see that many efforts within seeking to expand Jesus' reign in this world will fall on soil that will not produce fruit. Jesus tells this parable to his disciples to reorient their vision for walking in obedience to his commandment — showing that we are not to judge the faithfulness by whether the seed came to fruition, but by stepping out in faith to cast the seed.
 - 2. Kingdom work will be *smaller* than we desire. We must come to terms with the reality that most ministry within the church happens in small, seemingly insignificant contexts. Many people will never minister beyond 2-3 individuals at any given time. We must seek to gain God's evaluation of our labors in order that we might not despise the day of small things.
 - 3. Kingdom work will be *slower* than we had hoped for. The work of the Great Commission, of expanding Christ's kingdom in the world, and in our case, setting out to rebuild and repair a fallen house is demonstrated to be much slower than we might expect. The process of a seed (acorn) growing into a full plant (oak tree) or leaven working its way through the lump of dough takes both time and hiddenness.
- E. To reorient our perspectives, we must see how Jesus defines true and lasting greatness (success) within his kingdom. He does not tie success to outcome, but to wholehearted pursuit (and obedience) to his words and our faithful (intentional) teaching of others to do the same. It is important to remember that Jesus does not evaluate success based on size and scope of our ministry — but on our intentional commitment to ourselves live and call others to live in a wholehearted spirit of obedience to his ways.

¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5.19)

IV. WORKING TOWARD OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

- A. The Lord is desiring that as we set out to accomplish the work of his kingdom in this world, that our perspectives are shaped by the goal of what he wants to ultimately do.
- B. Our minds and hearts will grow discouraged or be edified in faith based on the vision that we have of what success looks like in our labors. Many people grow discouraged, despairing, embittered, and offended when their expectations meet the reality of God's activity in the world.
- ³"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (Matt 11.3-6)
- C. The image of planting oak trees needs to shape the concept of what we are hoping to accomplish in our own lives and in the life of this spiritual family in the grace of God.
- D. Many Christians need to regain a vision for what God can do over the entirety of a life, over the course of generations, and even over centuries.
- E. Western Christians need to fight against the prevailing cultural waters that make us believe that we can have "*anything, everything, now*". What would happen if this spiritual family caught a vision to labor in a way that was still providing fruit in the neighborhood and city 150 years from now if the Lord were to tarry?
- F. We also must be infused with confidence to understand that although the seed and the fruit look nothing alike but the seed possesses everything necessary to produce the fruit. Because of this, our labors to faithfully sow in faith in plowing and planting season will not be in vain — not because of the nature of our labors (what we are doing) but because of the nature of the seed and the faithfulness of our God!

⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. (Gal 6.7)

⁴The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing (Prov 20.4)

³⁰I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, ³¹and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. ³²Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. (Prov 24.30-32)

G. Planting oak trees:

1. *Personal*: Consider the ways that you are giving your life away. Ask the Lord for his perspective on where you are sowing and ask him to strengthen you to realign your life around his desires. To engage this kind of work at a personal level requires an intentional pursuit of God through his word and prayer (get a plan, self-discipline, personal integrity, accountability) and setting our hearts to walk before him with a spirit of obedience.

2. *Outlook*: Ask the Lord for eyes to see beyond yourself and your present experience. Commit outcomes to the Lord and seek to walk before him with eyes of faith.

⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes (I Cor 4.6)

3. *Family*: Intentionally seek to strengthen ties within your family. This can be your marriage, with your children (seeking to walk in obedience to Deut 6 and Eph 6.4), or with your extended family.

4. *Discipleship*: Jesus has called us to work to make new spiritual children through *witness* and *discipleship*. Look for ways to walk in a spirit of obedience to the Great Commission by declaring the truth of God's kingdom and teaching other Christians to walk in obedience to all that Jesus commanded.