

**Sermon Transcript from May 22nd, 2016
Rebuild, Restore, Renew
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Amen. Wow, that's, I think, the best introduction I've ever had. If a third of it is true, I'm happy. I want to start with Isaiah and we're going to start in chapter 61. Now, I know that you guys have been moving through this book and I'm not going to super delve into all of the themes of this book because I know you've been working on it. But, I just want to read this chapter. Those of you who have read the New Testament and know it will know, too, that this is a chapter that Jesus reads in the synagogue where that fateful day He gets up in the local synagogue where they bring out the Torah scroll. It's unfurled. He's the reader for that day and He starts reading, which is a very normal thing to happen in a synagogue. But then, basically, points to the fact that in this reading things are happening in Him. A bold bold statement to make.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort those who mourn;

"to console those who mourn in Zion [Israel]—to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

"They shall rebuild the old ruins; they shall raise up the former desolations; they shall repair the ruined cities and desolations of many generations.

"Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks and the sons of foreigners shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers; but you shall be named the priests of the Lord; they shall call you the servants of our God; you shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast.

"Instead of your shame you shall have double honor; instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion; therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs.

"For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offerings; I will direct their worth in truth and make with them an everlasting covenant. Their descendants shall be known amongst the Gentiles [the nations; the goyim], and their offspring among the people; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity who the God has blessed.

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments and as a bride adorns herself with jewels.

"For as the earth brings forth its bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all of the nations."

What we have here as we're moving to the end of the book is really the resolution of a tension that's at the center of this book. Israel knows that it's being called to be a chosen people plucked out of the nations, given a divine mandate and destiny, and yet reality does not seem to align with that destiny. Instead of being at the forefront of the nations, a superpower, the uni-power directing world affairs, Israel finds itself as a small, fragile nation that has entered into exiles. Instead of being at the top of the pile, it's the kicking boy at the bottom of the pile.

And this promise that God will use Israel to redeem the world starts to zero in here on this point that through Israel, the world will be blessed. The broken down places rebuilt. At the beginning of the chapter, we see this prophetic mantle that Jesus points to Himself saying that these things – the healing of the sick, the good tidings for the poor, those who mourn are to be repaired – will happen through this Messiah. And then it points to the fact that it's not just the Messiah who will do this, but the people who follow Him will partake in this repairing of the world. "Tikkun olam" in Hebrew. Putting the broken parts of the world back together.

The moral question is one that really bugs me. It's probably the question that I have to put a lot of my life into. What does this look like for people in cities like yours and mine? There's this bandwidth of cities around the world who have a commonality. My city is obsessed with coffee to the point of it being a new religion. It's literally ridiculous. I sneeze and there's a coffee shop just popped up behind me. My city is obsessed with food. We have the most restaurants and cafes per capita of any city in the world. Again, there's always some new place to go to to have brunch, always some new fusions of food. "Have you tried the Mongolian Ecuadorian mash-up that's happening downtown?"

If it hasn't been invented, when I get home there'll be one of them near my house, I'm sure. My city, in a sporting landscape which traditionally has had indigenous sports, loves the fact that it's embraced soccer, and its soccer stadiums are filled and it loves soccer, but it's also a little bit of a thing like, "We're a little bit European compared to the rest of the country."

I'm sure it's very different to your environment. My city, in contrast to the political landscape of much of the rest of the country, prides itself on being the smartest. Our book shops are kinds of temples. Not just our bounded volumes, but our own intelligence and enlightenment and how we look down on those rednecks in the north who, in their ruralness, don't really understand just how clever and sophisticated we are.

The equivalent of the governor of my state recently said his goal is to make us the most progressive state in the whole of the country. Again, this is probably just completely foreign to you guys and I apologize that I'm coming from so strange a place.

It's not just our cities. This could be Wellington in New Zealand, Copenhagen in Denmark, this could be Berlin in Germany, it could be San Francisco, Austin. There is this bandwidth of cities around the world and it's all very similar. It's kind of the globalization for people who don't like globalization. But, my question is, being a minister in this environment, what is the good news in this environment? What does the Kingdom of God look like in cities like ours?

At the center of the philosophy and founding charism, if you'd like, of our cities, you can trace this back to a philosopher who lived before Christ. A man named "Epicurus." His reaction to the world and the question of whether the gods existed was to say, "I just don't know. It's beyond me. So, what I'm going to do is hang with a group of friends, we're not going to be too ostentatious, we're going to enjoy things, we're going to eat food together, we're going to have dinner parties and hang out at our house and just create this perfect little bubble.

Epicurus' sort of main interpreter, a man called "Lucretius," who wrote a book called "On the Nature of Things," took this philosophy further and posited that, once we die, we simply are reduced into atoms. So, we should live life for enjoyment, experience, pleasure and not be over extravagant in that, but we just don't know."

He echoes the words of Macbeth, who says that life is a tale told by idiots, filled with sound and fury, signifying nothing. So, just have fun. Enjoy. Enjoy a nature hike, enjoy the latest food and create a little bubble of a culture around it.

An Italian traveler discovered Lucretius' book hidden in a bookshelf in Germany. It had been lost through the period of Christendom and the rise of Christianity in Europe. The rediscovery of that text, many people, including the author Stephen Greenblatt, who wrote a book called "The Swerve," say, "That's when the modern world is reborn." The vision of a very different understanding to this kind of Kingdom of God that Christianity had put into the world, rather, this reduced kingdom of god which seems to have some of the elements of the Kingdom of God but is reduced and small. Instead of the sweeping vistas of justice and goodness and healing and hope and restoration that we see in this text, we have fun. Feelings. A little social family.

So, the interesting thing is that the vision of the cities like yours and mine now exists at a really really interesting time in history. And, in many ways, we suffer from what I call "the arrogance of geography." What would Portland be like if we moved Cascadia and placed it between Syria and Iraq? What if we took Melbourne and New Zealand and moved them in between Russia and Poland right now? Would it look the same? No. It wouldn't. There is an element in the culture which we enjoy and like – I'm not going to lie – but is made possible because we live in these safe environments where we actually don't have to align the reality of

our culture with what's happening in reality.

We live in a time where – as George Packer calls it – there's an unraveling. At the time where the coffee culture of my city is going to entirely new levels where I think they're going to need to start splitting atoms in coffee cups soon, it's the same time that we lived through the rise of the Messianic, apocalyptic caliphate that now straddles Syria and Iraq and that now has outposts it's claiming in Libya. This is the same time in history where the global order, which seemed to have a period of peace relatively from the fall of the Cold War and November 9th, 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, to now we see the rise of an increasingly aggressive Iran, Turkey under Erdogan, Russia under the Kleptocracy of Vladimir Putin. We see a world in which politics, brought to the center by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, is now pushing to the hard right and the hard left across the world.

What is happening politically in your country is happening everywhere from Finland to the Philippines. We live in a world in which economic inequality still exists even if we talk about it less. So, the question for us as people trying to follow Jesus in a time in history like this is what is our response? Do we simply fall into this position where we lull ourselves to sleep by the comfort that surrounds us? In the mid part of the 20th century, two books were written predicting the future. One of them was George Orwell's 1984, which is about a totalitarian, dictator state ruled by "Big Brother" who looked into and saw everything. It was a reflection of what Orwell saw in the Stalinist regime.

Aldous Huxley wrote another book called "Brave New World." In his book, people were not held in place by guards and people watching them all the time. Rather, they were lulled into complacency by a culture which gave them everything. They sit in these cinemas that are three-dimensional spaces, falling asleep, drugged out of their brains with a drug called "Soma," the Greek word for "sleep." We live in the Brave New Worlds of our cities and what these places do is attempt, in a world filled with chaos and disorder and corruption and injustice, is to pretend it's not happening here. That happens in those cities. That happens with those people. Those people haven't come up to our way of thinking. It happens over there, but not here. We're different. We're little islands of people who just get it.

So, do we need these words? Do we need God's justice? Do we need His vengeance? Do we need this binding up? No, thanks. We've got it sorted. We've read those books, been to that course. We have these things.

And what happens is this world we try and create where we sit in the cafe having brunch on Saturday morning and we push away the worries of the world. But, in some way, we lose something that's essential to being human. In Ecclesiastes 3 it says that eternity has been put in the human heart. Part of that human heart comes from the fact that we are created for a drama. The drama that you guys are working through this season of teaching as you look at this spread of Scripture, this book represents reality that it's told in acts.

It begins with the story of a good creation and a good God, which is ruined by this question that a snake in the garden asks; the challenging, subversive thought that humans, even though they have everything, can be in control and be like God; a whisper that rips apart shalom. But, instead of tearing the world apart, punishing humans and ripping apart the cosmos for this sin of treachery, God begins this slow, patient work of redemption. He calls apart a nation to mirror His shalom; His Kingdom; His ways. When that nation cannot do that, He comes Himself. And the price that should've been paid for humanity's rebellion is paid by God Himself. The King of the universe is crowned on a Roman cross, naked, in utter, mind-boggling shame in Jewish culture.

And we live in this in-between time where Jesus rises out of the grave, defeats sin, defeats evil and then, at the end of time, the final act when God comes to restore the world. This is a grand drama; this is a grand narrative. But, we want to live in a world that increasingly has no drama. Throughout history, one of the things of parenthood is to teach children the inherent, tragic nature of life. One of the roles of fatherhood throughout almost every culture, from Lapland to Australian Aboriginals, is to take children as they come of age into a process where they understand the adult nature of the world. In our language now, the adult nature of the world are adult things that link to sex. But, the adult nature of the world is the reality of tragedy; the reality that the world is unjust; the reality that each of us shuffles for a moment on this mortal coil and then passes.

People note that in most cultures this happened between six and twelve. In Nelson

Mandela's incredibly huge autobiography – that's worth every page – "Long Walk to Freedom," he tells the story of when in his village one day the boys are taken out into the bush in South Africa and taught these things, the tragic nature of life. They're taught the way, then, to act as adults. And then the climax is just, oh my goodness, eye watering. And they're circumcised with a sort of blunt stone. Yes, you're allowed to squirm, men. But they come home different; changed; initiated; entered into a way of understanding that is in alignment with reality.

However, in our culture, over the last 30-40 years, that line has moved. It used to be the end of elementary school and then it got pushed to the end of junior high and then it got pushed to the end of high school. It used to be college. Not anymore. College is, increasingly across the Western world, becoming places where we coddle people and protect them from the tragic unjust nature of life that you don't get everything your way, that you aren't a god and change everything in the universe, and actually it's now pushed into the workplace.

In Australia now, financial companies, they now have this thing where your parents – some of them – can come and check out your workspace, if it's okay. I was talking to an HR rep, and it's becoming an increasing trend of parents turning up to job interviews. And even, in some cases, instead of their child. It's like, "Wow, you look quite old for 23-year-old."

And we have this helicopter, hovering parent wanting to protect. And I get that. When I had a child it was like my brain was taken out. I used to be able to watch the news like a male without a child and just be like, "Oh, yeah. Cool. I can handle all this."

And then, when I had a child, that moment when my daughter's eyes locked on mine, I was changed. I wanted to protect her, walk through bullets, push the world away and keep her pristine and pure. But, that's not how life works. So, there's this inherent drama that we are not invited in to. In some ways, what the Melbournes and Portlands and Wellingtons and Berlins are are these places where we try and create an everlasting childhood; a palace of Peter Pans, never growing up and who shun responsibility; who run away from adulthood.

So, one of the incredible challenges of doing church in this time and place is not only do you have to preach the Word, not only do you have to teach the kingdom, not only do you have to create spaces where the Spirit can move, you have to invite people into the actual reality of what life is like, educate them that the way that they've been taught about the world doesn't align with reality, that there is a tragic nature to life and that, actually, hard things are used for God for good.

I just want to give you four ways in which stepping into that reality will change your life. Because, you know what? The interesting, interesting thing about the reality of these most comfortable little enclaves in the Western world is that when you peel back the coffee and the Activewear and the organic plastic, underneath it there is rampant anxiety. Maclean's Magazine says that 86% of U.S. college students now describe themselves as overly anxious, exhausted even though they don't do a lot, burnt out on that one-day-a-week job, and afraid.

Before 1960, cutting was virtually unknown. Before 1960, youth suicide was virtually unknown. If you want to go to countries where those things don't exist, you go to countries where people have to scabble and graft and work hard and there's no choice anxiety, you've got a purpose that you're walking towards. But, we live under the oppression of a cruel freedom. We live under the weight of choice anxiety. We follow the God whose great prayer for Israel is the Shema. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord God is one."

But, for us, we're given a million mini-gods, a million little questions, a million little options. "What are you going to be?"

John Mark and I were just on the Northern California coast near an ambassador's outpost of where a new thought came to this country, a place called Esalen where a man called Werner Erhard spoke about this idea that, actually, inside of it there's nothing there. That the onus, then, is for you to create yourself. You are oppressed with the heretical notion that you have the weight of making yourself upon you. You don't. You are called, created, knitted in your mother's womb by the God of the universe who knows who you are. The search to find yourself within only leads you to an incredibly anxious place of comparison. And what happens is the reality of our beautiful cities are revealed as the mirage they really are.

We have this thing – I've had this a number of times in pastoral ministry, my staff have – where we'll have someone come to us, very often a girl in her 20's, and she comes and says this, "Look, I am so good friends with Mary. And I look at Mary's life and I look at her Facebook and her Instagram and I just feel terribly about myself because she's so pretty and she looks fantastic and she goes to all these wonderful things and she just has this brilliant life and I don't have that. It's not there. And every time I look at my phone I see Mary. And when I get together with Mary, it's okay. But, I hate Instagram Mary.

And then, like a week later, Mary comes to us. "Jane. Jane's Instagram. She's so pretty and she goes these amazing places and her job's just fantastic."

And no one's talking. Constant comparison because of this mythology that there's this perfect world that you can achieve through the right combination like a safe-cracker. Just spin it, get it right, do it and then boom, Pandora's box, shalom rejoiced, will open for you.

Four things. The first thing is if God creates the narrative Scripture as a grand drama, you're going to face drama. Your life is actually a drama of tension. In every story told in history that's worth reading it's normally about an ordinary person who faces a challenge. Luke Skywalker – I put this in for John Mark. Luke Skywalker – sorry. My household is a Star Wars household. My kids are just obsessed.

Luke Skywalker is a farm boy who then is drawn into something bigger than himself. There is chaos and disorder in the universe. Things are not as they're meant to be. Harry Potter is under the stairs, drawn into a world that's bigger. The heroic element in ourselves that faith calls out only is ignited when we're drawn into a struggle. When we just want to stay in the coffee shop and push away the world's problems, when we want to self-medicate, however you do that, whether it's from drugs, alcohol or just endless endless doing of this. Your life will have drama. If it doesn't have it now, it's coming. This is a world filled with relational breakdown and with illness. We are all going to die in this room. One in three people get cancer, one in three people get heart disease. Something is coming if it's not here now. But, my suspicion is for many of you that it's here now and we can't talk about it because of the myth of this perfect world.

But, you will face drama. We live in a world that is filled with drama and chaos and tension and imperfection. But, we need to reframe how we see this because the drama is the making of the protagonist in the story and the drama is the making of you. Paul says in Romans that God uses bad things for good, and that will be the story of your life. You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your response. Giving it to God.

My overwhelming battle for the last period of at least 10 years of my life has been an overwhelming battle with bi-polarity. I didn't ask for it; it came to me. And I'm leading a church, just given birth to twins – I didn't give birth to twins. That would be a drama. My wife giving birth to twins at the moment when I was having an episode. Was that all meant to happen? All meant to be passed? The filled with time and energy whose lives perfect and together, but God has used that drama in my life in the most incredible ways. I don't drink. I have to have a routine life. I have to get to bed early. I have to be really careful when I travel. Everything that our spontaneous, fun-filled world says that we shouldn't do that bizarrely has brought this incredible focus, this healing in my life.

You are facing a drama now. One will come. You get to choose to run away or let it be the making of Christ remaking you in His character.

Number two: in any story of drama, anything worth its while, the person then thrown into drama recognizes that they don't have the resources within them to face that disorder, drama, chaos or whatever it may be. So, they must go and seek out wisdom outside of themselves. The great Greek myth that all truth is found within is rejected. They must look outside of you. Classically, you will have Gandalf come for Frodo. You have Obi-Wan Kenobi for Luke Skywalker. Every story, there is some form of wisdom which comes. For us, it's this understanding that there is a loving God in the universe who is the only resource which can help you defeat the drama you are in. To do that, though, requires us to do something which is completely heretical in our secular kingdom of god: to give up authority.

We don't like to give up authority because we are kings of our own kingdom of god without the King. So, you see these little trends happening. It's not big, but it's a little mini revolution that's happening in the world at the moment. It's happening all across that

bandwidth of core cities where the great fuel of the Church, the great fuel that has powered the Church, is the Holy Spirit but how people respond to that Spirit, and that fuel is commitment. We don't like commitment. When I talk to denominational heads and they're like, "We now see 'regular' as coming once a month."

We fear that if we commit ourselves and give over ourselves to something that we will be held back. It will cut down our options to escape from the oppressive freedom of our lives. We must choose one thing with all of our hearts. Commitment. Give ourselves to it. Be disciples. A disciple is someone who allows themselves to be taught Jesus' way as an apprentice that says, "I don't know how to do this. Please teach me."

This completely goes against the egalitarian equality mandates of our culture to say, "I don't know how to live. Teach me the ways of Christ."

The third thing is: classically, the person in the midst of the drama discovers that their desire to put evil out there is a false one. In Melbourne, classically progressive Melbourne, we point northward and go, "Oh, those people in Queensland in the north, they're rednecks. They don't get it. They're racist. They do this."

And we put evil in some huge thing. Other people do this. It's illegal immigrants, it's that group. Whatever it is, it's out there. But, the protagonist discovers – again, Star Wars. Let's just go there. Empire Strikes Back. When Luke goes into the cave and there's that bit where he sees Darth Vader's face in his, half weird thing. I was disturbed. I was a young child. But, what it says is, as Nietzsche said, "Monsters who fight monsters can become monsters."

Solzhenitsyn said that the line between good and evil does not exist between two groups of people, but runs through the human heart. The evil that we think is outside of our cities because we're so progressive, we're so enlightened, "If other people just read the right books, go in the right courses and just be tolerant," that evil exists with us. We're the ones living in one of the most opulent, comfortable cultures in history while the world is suffering. Read the Bible. That's not a good place to be.

I make bad decisions, I make selfish decisions, our lives are filled with lust not just for sex, but so many things. We are a culture which is obsessed with seeing and getting and acquiring and consuming. Each one of us has a mandate to destruction because of their fallen nature. When we realize that, that there's the drama out there but the drama in here, then we're taken on a different path. A path that requires an incredibly bravery. A bravery of giving up and saying, "Father, I am not in control."

But ultimately it flows under a greater bravery, which is my last point. That at the end, there are classically two types of stories you'll see. Classically, in American literature and movies, one is the story of redemption where we have all these things: a hero is taken out of their environment and there's chaos and disorder in the world. They then meet someone who's a bit of a person who gives them some guidance. Then, at the end, they destroy the enemy, smoke a cigarette and walk off into the distance, sometimes with a girl and sometimes with not. Depends on how many restrictions you'll put on their life. Yet in the stories which I think reflect the Biblical narrative, at the end of Harry Potter he gives his life. There's that image of the death that comes, a link back to a medieval vision that they still write in Europe of Christ, the giving up of self. That the story, at the end, reaches its completion as the protagonist gives their life for something greater. What we face is the incredible, staggering reality that the answer to the chaos in the world, the answer to the chaos and disorder and disobedience in ourselves is met by Christ.

We don't have to die; we just have to follow Him. So, that person in those first verses, Isaiah 61:1-3, who promises to come into the world, who the spirit of the Lord is upon, who proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, He will take death upon Himself. But, what we are invited to in the beautiful worlds of Portland and Melbourne, as people who follow their Christ who has given everything, is to be revolutionary rebuilders.

Isaiah 61:4: **"They shall rebuild the old ruins; they shall raise up the former desolations; they shall repair the ruined cities,"** – that may look super beautiful to those without spiritual eyes.

And we build that with heroism flowing from the Spirit, which happens in thousands of minuscule things. This church in this city has a bigger mandate than you realize. God's answer for what He wants to do in Portland actually lies – your part of that answer that

when God is up there, who knows where, in heaven at the heavenly throne and He's planning the redemption for it to be in Portland as it is in Heaven, you were designed, you were chosen, you were part of that plan. Who would have thunk it? Little old you, filled with anxiety and fear. He chooses you as an act of grace and the church is this coming together of a thousand little choices, a thousand little commitments that rebuild ruins that you cannot see.

You are called. The leaders here can't do it themselves. We live in the midst of an energy crisis in the Church that's ebbing away. Your challenge is not the soldiers of the Islamic State; your challenge is the beautiful world that wants to give you its soma to drag you away. How will you choose?

I'm going to ask you to stand now. We're just going to pray.

Father, we live in such beautiful places. We have so many options before us. But we know, Father, as Ecclesiastes tells us, without You, those options are meaningless. I want to pray for this city and Your plans for this place. I want to thank You that this church was designed in Your mind before time began. That these individuals were chosen. I pray, Father, in this place, that these people shine this light that is so different that in a city of consumption, they become givers. In a city of the anxiety that lives under the beautiful surface, that they become people of peace and shalom.

I pray, Father, that these people, in a time where we don't want to commit, become just emblems of devotion to You. I want to pray, Father, that in a time where we run away from drama, that You'll allow us to walk into it, being changed in Your character as Your Spirit moves amongst us.

Just spend a moment listening to His call for you. You are so much more worth while than you realize. He has plans that you can't even grasp yet. And those plans, those individual notes of your lives, weave together in a grand symphony that He is playing if you will have ears to hear in this city. Just spend some time sitting in that as we worship. In a moment, we'll take communion. But just stay with that truth.