

A Vision for Oakwood

Isaiah 61

Good morning everyone. It is such a joy to be here this morning as we praise the Lord for making His will clear and leading our paths together. Our whole family is so grateful for the warm welcome we have received from the Oakwood family and we are very excited to worship and serve our great God and Savior alongside you!

My prayer and vision for Oakwood can be summarized in three words: **Rooted, Growing and Fruitful**. I pray that we will increasingly become a church that is deeply rooted in God's Word, that is diligently growing in God's grace and that is fruitful for God's glory.

Let's see what this means by walking through Isaiah 61 together. Listen again to the opening verses of this text that Jesus used when he started his ministry, as recorded in Luke 4. He stood up in his hometown synagogue, read Isaiah 61:1-2 and then declared, *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

*"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me **to bring good news** to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...**" Isaiah 61:1-2*

Jesus came to announce good news. Isaiah wrote this 700 years before Jesus was born and this was true of that ancient prophet just as it was later true for Jesus. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Isaiah the prophet and anointed him with a message of good news.

Like all the apostles and prophets, Isaiah spoke with the authority of God Himself. One commentator counted 3,800 times that the Bible uses the phrase "God said" or "Thus says the Lord." A quick You Version Bible App search shows the phrase "Thus says the Lord" appears 187 times in Isaiah alone.

Notice in just the first verse and a half of Isaiah 61 **the language of proclamation**: "bring good news" in Isaiah is rendered "proclaim good news" in Luke 4. Isn't it interesting that liberty for the captives is ***proclaimed*** just as the year of the Lord's favor is ***announced***? We might expect the prophecy to say that the Messiah would set captives free and release those who are bound but instead He ***proclaims*** freedom.

This is like President Lincoln's Declaration of Independence. It did not make all the slaves in the south instantly free in reality, but the legal proclamation set their freedom in motion. What Lincoln declared the Union Army had to fight to accomplish. Similarly, **what Jesus declared at the start of His ministry He gave His life to accomplish at the end of His ministry**. But His proclamation set in motion the freedom from sin and death that His people would experience in Him.

And just as God's Word through the prophet Isaiah was perfectly reliable, so His Word through Jesus is something we can build our lives upon. This is where we must dig our roots – deeply into the Word of God. If we build our lives on anything else, it is shifting sand. If your life and security and happiness are built on a relationship, what do you do when that relationship is on the rocks or when the person passes away? If your life is built on financial security what do you do when you lose your job or the market collapses? If your life is built on a career path what do you do when you don't get the promotion or the doors in front of you all seem to be closed? Anything in this world is shifting sand and if we try to root our lives in relationships, or money or career, or hobbies or just general "happiness" we are in grave danger when any storm or trial comes.

But a life, a worldview, a church, a ministry, a family, a vocation – anything that is deeply rooted in God's Word will be steadfast and immovable.

For each of the three parts of the vision I will provide a definition, an application and a summary.

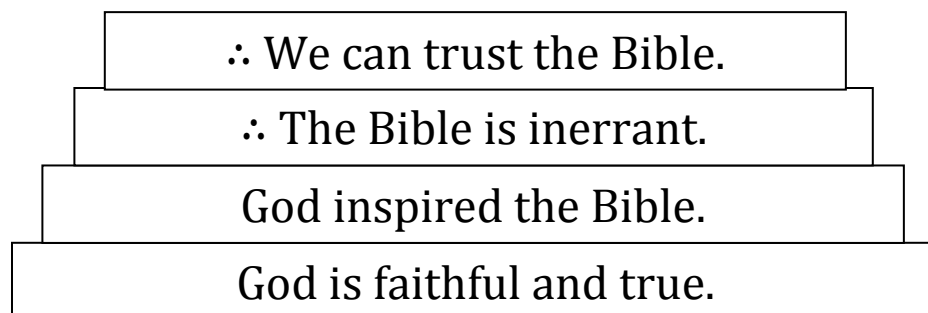
Here is a **definition** for a church that is rooted in God's Word: ***we will be firmly established in the perfectly reliable and eternally unchanging proclamation of God.***

God's Word – the things God has gone on record to say and has preserved for us throughout the centuries in the Bible – this is what we can and must dig ourselves into. In a world in which everything is transitory and moving, this is the one thing we can hold on to, the one thing we can count on.

For God's Word is perfectly reliable. ***God is truth*** and therefore He cannot speak anything even the slightest bit untrue. ***God is unchanging*** therefore anything He said a long time ago is just as true now as it will be for all of eternity. The doctrine of **the inerrancy of Scripture** is one we must fight for. God's word is infallible and will accomplish everything He desires but it is infallible precisely because it is inerrant. To deny or water down the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is to undermine the authority of the Bible and the very character of God.

Here's the progression of thought.

1) God is faithful and true. 2) God inspired every word of the Bible. 3) Therefore every word of the Bible (in the originals) is completely inerrant. 4) Therefore we can totally trust what God has revealed in the Bible and particularly His promises.



Because the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God we can rely on it completely – we can trust what this book says. And if we dig our roots deeply into Scripture – both as individuals and as a church – we will be firmly established: unshakeable and steady like the “oaks of righteousness” mentioned in verse 3.

Here is our first application: ***unshakeable joy in the Lord flows from confidence in His unbreakable promises.***

The first fruit of being a believer rooted in God’s Word is joy. If your joy is attached to anything but your relationship with God based on His unbreakable promises it will be a tenuous and unpredictable joy. It will fluctuate with the changing conditions of your life. If things are going well you will feel up. But if things are going poorly you will feel down.

Followers of Jesus should have a deep and abiding joy in Him no matter what the circumstances of their lives. We will see this as we walk through Philippians in the coming weeks. The Apostle Paul endured every hardship you can imagine – more than all the suffering in this room combined when you count his many persecutions, sacrifices and losses.

And yet, he obviously had an unshakeable joy. Where did that joy come from? He tells us directly in Philippians – “for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” His life and heart and identity was so wrapped up in Jesus that he could rejoice in the Lord even when he was chained to a Roman guard, even when he was being whipped with 39 lashes, even when he was clinging to a wooden board in another shipwreck.

Do you have a deep and unshakeable joy? If you do, it is because you have dug your roots deeply into a relationship with God through His Word. If you do not have a strong and abiding joy it may be because your roots in Scripture are not as deep and strong as they should be.

So here is the summary for this first point – **“Rejoice in the Lord.”**

That will be our recurring theme and rallying cry this fall. “Rejoice in the Lord.” That is a direct command from Scripture, stated three times in Philippians.

How can we rejoice in the Lord, even when things are hard? Let’s dig our roots deeply into God’s Word together – here in our worship services, as families around our dinner tables, in our community groups and Bible studies and, of course, in the quietness of our own time with the Lord. Listen to the joy Isaiah describes as a PROMISE to God’s people:

“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; ***to comfort all who mourn***; to grant to those who mourn in Zion – to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, ***the oil of gladness*** instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit...” Isaiah 61:2-3

“Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor ***they shall rejoice in their lot***; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; ***they shall have everlasting joy... I will greatly rejoice in the Lord***; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with

the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness... v. 11 for as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, **so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up** before all the nations." Isaiah 61:7,10-11

This is God's promise. He will do it. He will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up – for our everlasting joy and His everlasting glory. So rejoice in the Lord. Fix your joy in Him. Root your heart and life deeply in the promises of God's Word. And the central promise of God's Word is to save His people who cling to Him in faith. As we better understand and apply the Gospel we will grow in God's grace.

That is the second part of the vision. May we not only be deeply rooted in God's Word, but may we also be actively and intentionally **growing in God's grace**. The Gospel is written all over this passage. It was good news that Isaiah announced in His prophecy and good news that Jesus proclaimed in the Nazareth synagogue. Notice for WHOM this message will be good news.

This Gospel is for the poor, the hurting and the slaves. The message of God's grace is only for the poor in spirit – for those who know they need it; for those who know they don't deserve anything from God but His judgment. This Good News is also for the hurting - it brings comfort to the brokenhearted, joy to those who mourn. This good news is for people who realize that this world is not what we were made for and who forsake the comforts and pleasures of this world for the eternal joy of the next world.

And this good news is about freedom for prisoners. Apart from Christ people are enslaved to their own desires and sins but in Christ the captives are set free, those who mourn over their sins are comforted as they are forgiven and those who know they are poor in spirit rejoice at the grace that has been poured out over them. The more we understand the depths of our own sin the more we will appreciate the heights of God's grace to cover them and the more motivated we will be to give our lives to Him in growing faith and obedience.

So here is my definition for Growing in God's grace: ***increasing obedience to the Lord motivated by faith in His finished work.***

If we are a church that is gospel-centered – and I know that is Oakwood's legacy and vision – then it means we must fight side by side in the battle to believe the Gospel. One writer put it this way:

"The battle is not to conquer sin. That's impossible. The battle is to believe the Gospel: that Jesus has conquered sin." (Jonathan Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship*).

Brothers and sisters, the decisive battle with sin and death was won 2,000 years ago when Jesus died and rose again. Our Lord and Savior made His declaration of Independence when he unrolled the Isaiah Scroll in Nazareth – proclaiming freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind – and then he fulfilled His own proclamation by giving his life as a ransom for many and taking up the life he had laid down, rising from the dead in victory over sin and death forever.

Jesus has conquered sin. In Him, we are free. If you belong to Jesus then sin is no longer your master because you are no longer under the law of sin and death but are now under grace and are governed by the new law of the Spirit of life!

It is our faith in the finished work of Christ that motivates us to obey His Word. The fuel of discipleship is gratitude. If your obedience to God's Word is low, then remember and focus on all that Jesus has done for you. It is only as we experience how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ that we can be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Listen again to the Gospel in Isaiah 61, starting in v. 8 –

“I will make ***an everlasting covenant*** with them... all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are ***an offspring the Lord has blessed***. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult 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 like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels.”

700 years before Jesus, Isaiah foretold a new covenant – an everlasting covenant that God would make with His people. As a result of this covenant people from all the nations on earth will see God's people and acknowledge that they are blessed by the Lord as His offspring – as His children. And look at the joy that flows from what Isaiah announces already as a finished work in his time: “He HAS clothed me with the garments of salvation; he HAS covered me with the robe of righteousness.”

Even in the Old Testament believers were saved by grace alone through faith alone. Isaiah's faith looked forward to the coming Messiah who would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our sins. The punishment that brought Isaiah peace would be upon that suffering servant and by the wounds of Jesus – 700 years later – Isaiah was healed before God; forgiven, justified, reconciled and adopted as a child of God. God clothed Isaiah with the garments of salvation and covered Isaiah with the robe of Jesus' perfect righteousness.

Have you let God do that for you?

Imagine every sin you have ever committed as a stain on your clothing. You may try to wash some of them out – and you never completely can. But even as you try to wash out old stains you continue to make new stains. Before long we all come to realize that the clothing of our hearts and lives is hopelessly soiled – disgustingly filthy and beyond hope of ever coming clean.

But this is precisely why Jesus came – to take your sin-stained clothes and give you His perfectly righteous, radiant robe of righteousness. Jesus is the only one who ever lived a life of perfect righteousness. He never once faltered in His obedience to the Father – Jesus never once put a single blemish on the clothing of His life. And so the life of Jesus is like a perfectly clean robe of righteousness that He can give to anyone who comes to Him in faith. But you cannot have that robe unless you give Jesus your sin-stained life. You cannot have His righteousness without letting go of your sin. You cannot truly profess faith in Jesus without at the same time turning from your sin in repentance.

But what a glorious moment it is when a sinner repents and makes that exchange with Jesus. Let me tell you Lin's story. Lin was raised as a Buddhist in Malaysia. Her family was very poor and made what little money they could by harvesting latex from the trees that grew around their simple home. One day Lin's younger brother was swimming in a nearby pond and went too deep and found himself in trouble. Lin was not able to swim any more than he was, but she dove in to help him anyway. As she reached for her brother who was going under water, her dressed had filled with just enough air to keep her afloat and allow her to pull her brother back to safety.

Lin had several other stories like this of how she knew God was at work in her life but she did not begin to follow Him until much later. Fast forward to this time last year when she started dating a believer named Mike who brought her to our church in Chicago and together they got involved in a small group. Through Mike, that small group and the church, Lin came to finally understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and to commit her life to Him in faith. She said it was like a massive burden was lifted from her shoulders and she knew that she was free from the slavery of her Buddhist idol worship and ancestor worship.

It was my great privilege, as one of the last things I did at The Orchard, to baptize Lin, putting a public seal on her personal profession of faith.



Lin is a picture to me of someone who, for most of her life, resisted the exchange. She knew God was real and that He had even saved her life on several occasions. But she resisted Him and held on to her old sin-stained life, unwilling to let it go. She said, "I spent 50 years running from God but this year I finally let Him catch up to me. And I'm so glad that I did."

Like every believer in Jesus, Lin is a trophy of God's grace. Her life is totally different now that she has been set free from generations of deception and the worship of false gods. And she is growing wonderfully in the grace of Christ – joyfully learning more from God's Word every day and growing in her obedience to the Word, very much motivated by her faith in the finished work of Christ on her behalf and very much helped by the small group that helped her understand the gospel in the first place!

And that is the application for this point: ***pursuing ongoing progress toward maturity in Christ in fellowship with other believers.***

Followers of Jesus should not remain stagnant or stuck – we should continually be putting off our old sinful self that was crucified with Christ and putting on our new self that is being renewed

daily in the image of our creator. To do this we need one another. This is not a fight we can win alone.

Listen to how Isaiah sees it in relation to the nation of Israel in v. 4:

“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... but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God... And as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.” Isaiah 61:4,6,11

Who is doing the building here? THEY are: the people of God. TOGETHER. There is important work for us to do – not in order to BE SAVED but because we ARE SAVED. Believers in Jesus have been dressed in His righteousness and we cannot add a single thing to that finished work. But our gratitude and joy in all the He has done for us should produce in us a deep and abiding motivation to make progress.

And we move forward together, locking arms with brothers and sisters beside us and spurring one another on to love and good deeds, to holiness and mission.

So here is the summary for the second point: “Keep moving forward.”

I take this unapologetically from Walt Disney himself as stated wonderfully in the animated film *Meet the Robinsons*. It’s the fun story of a young inventor who constantly fails and is very discouraged about it. But then he meets a family who celebrate failure and teach him the phrase, “Keep moving forward.” They celebrate failure because it means you tried. If you aren’t failing it’s because you aren’t trying, so failures are successes in the Robinson family. The point is to learn from your failures and keep improving, keep growing. Keep moving forward.

This should be our attitude and approach in the Christian life. We obviously don’t celebrate sin or failure in that sense, but we should celebrate our faltering attempts to read the Bible and pray and share the gospel and find different ways to serve in our community. If we aren’t failing in these areas it means we aren’t trying anything. Start a Bible reading plan. Carve out time in your day for prayer. Have a conversation about your faith with a friend or neighbor. Find a way to serve someone in need. Keep moving forward.

And do all of this WITH your Community Group. We learn and grow best in the context of community. This is the greenhouse for our growth. We need each other. We need the encouragement of a supportive church family. Pursue progress in your faith in fellowship with other believers.

The third point in the vision is to be a church that is fruitful for God’s glory. Do you see the progression? Rooted in God’s Word > Growing in God’s grace > fruitful for God’s glory. Just as a healthy tree digs deep roots for a stable foundation so we need deep roots in God’s unbreakable promises and the truth of His Word. Those roots will nourish and feed a vibrant life of faith in our own hearts and in our church ministries. We will experience the life of Christ in us and his power working through us as we grow to better understand and apply the gospel to our own hearts and

lives and as we make progress in fellowship with one another. Finally, the result of all of this will be much fruit for the glory of Jesus' name.

Here is a Definition: to be fruitful for God's glory means passionately worshiping God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Look at v. 3 and 11:

"That they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified... For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations." Isaiah 61:3,11

The ultimate purpose of history and our lives is to bring glory to God. When people see Christians who are strong in their character and loving in their relationships – who are "oaks of righteousness" – it should move them to honor God, not us. Our goal should be to let people know that we are just mirrors – just a dim reflection – of the glory of the One who made us and who saved us. It's all about Him.

We are a planting of the Lord. He started the work in us, he gave us the gift of faith, He nourishes and strengthens us throughout our lives and then He calls us home. It's all about Him. Look at v. 11 – as a garden causes things to grow in it – not the gardener – so the LORD causes us to grow and moves us to worship.

The application for us should be unashamed boldness to declare the glories of God here and around the world. Look again at vv. 1-2.

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... he has sent me to proclaim... the year of the LORD's favor... that he may be glorified." Isaiah 61:1-2,3

We have been anointed by the Holy Spirit with a specific mission – to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim that freedom from slavery to sin is now available in Christ, to announce the year of the Lord's favor. This great commission is not to bring attention to any one of us but for the explicit purpose that HE may be glorified – that the name of Jesus may be exalted.

So our final summary is: All for Jesus.

It's all about Him. Come back next week as we dive into the book of Philippians and learn from the Apostle Paul what it means to say, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," and we learn to apply the command in Php. 3 and 4 to "rejoice in the Lord, always."

May we be a church that is rooted in God's Word, growing in God's grace and fruitful for God's glory! Let's pray to that end.