

**Raised to Life
We are Freed
Isaiah 61:1-4
March 4, 2018**

The word freedom. It has incredible power doesn't it? I mean just the concept of being free inspires people to do extraordinary things. We can look back in history and see the fight for freedom across boundaries. We've seen it here in the United States in the revolutionary war and the civil war. We've seen it in South Africa to end Apartheid. We hear freedom and we hold it to be one of the greatest ideals to strive for. We think of being free from the chains of oppression. We think of being free from addictions or free from burdens that make us feel trapped. People around the world find themselves trapped and chained to all sorts of things. Whether it's the chains of addiction, the chains of perfectionism, or the chains of materialism, of keeping up with the joneses. We are all searching for freedom of some kind because we know what it is like to be controlled by something else inside us or external to us. Maybe you have an addiction to the praise of others, any people pleasers in the room? Maybe you need to have the newest iPhone or gadget that comes on the market so that you can keep up with your friends. Maybe you have a need to be a success at work to prove something to someone. Whatever it is you know what it is like to not be free. Our passage today offers hope to all those who find themselves ensnared or enchained to something that is not God.

[Read Passage: Isaiah 61:1-4]

Isaiah is writing to a people who are in exile. He is writing to people who are captive in a foreign land. The Israelites were being held captive in Babylon and were unsure when, or even if, they would ever be free. These words are meant to inspire hope and remind them that God is with them. There is something else though about this passage. You may recognize it because Jesus quotes from this passage. In Luke 4, Jesus is in the synagogue and he has the scroll of Isaiah opened to this passage and reads from it. Then he proclaims something amazing about it. He says that this passage has been fulfilled in their hearing. Jesus was saying that this passage was fulfilled through him. In other words, this message is for us all of us. It is for everyone who has ever felt trapped, who has ever felt captive or backed into a corner, who desires freedom from whatever keeps them weighed down.

Isaiah 61 begins by addressing several different people groups. He is talking to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners, and those who are mourning. The message is the same for everyone, God's kingdom has come, and they have freedom from whatever oppresses them. It is an incredible reversal of fortunes. And when Jesus reads this, he is proclaiming to everyone that not only has he fulfilled this passage but that true freedom can be found in him.

Freedom is found in Jesus.

Interestingly enough, there are many out there who would argue for the exact opposite. They look at Jesus and they look at Christianity and all they see are rules and they then think that freedom is not part of Jesus' message. That's primarily because people have begun to believe that freedom means doing whatever you want, whenever you want, and however you want. But, is that really freedom? Does freedom really mean doing whatever you want, whenever you want? That's the trap, right. Doing whatever you want, whenever you want is its own kind of chains. Don't believe me? How did the Israelites get into exile in the first place? It was because they were choosing to follow their own ways and pleasures rather than God? That kind of freedom led to their enslavement at the hands of a foreign power.

Think about it, human desire is unending, and we live in a society where enough is never enough. Our appetites for pleasure, for things, for new experiences are never satisfied. When we indulge in our senses and live that way, we become trapped by them. J.D. Rockefeller was a business tycoon who had just about everything. He was one of the richest men of his time. He was once asked famously how much money is

enough. His reply was just a little more. That's us, we're all a little bit selfish that way. When we indulge in our senses, when we believe that freedom is simply doing what we want, whenever we want, we trade our real freedom for a cheap imitation.

Selfish living is an imitation of freedom.

Freedom is much more than that. Freedom is about throwing off those things that cause bondage. It is about removing the things in our lives that inhibit the best version of ourselves, the version that God intended for us all along. That's how we find freedom in Jesus.

The passage says that good news is to be proclaimed to the poor, comfort to the brokenhearted, release to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners. This is the old Hebrew way of basically saying, everyone is free. When you see a list like this it is a poetic device used to convey totality. The neglected and disregarded, the people pleasers and the perfectionists, the downtrodden and abused. Freedom is for everyone!!!

Now, let's be honest for a moment, many people attempt to find freedom in other ways. We look at our circumstances and feel that we are trapped. So, we choose to escape somehow. There are those who attempt to escape the neglect they feel by trying to do things that make them fit in...which can lead to compromising values. There is a growing movement around younger people that crave success and achievement and when they fail to find it in the real world, they escape to video games where it is easier to find. Leaving them addicted to something that is slowly draining their lives. You see, when we pursue freedom apart from Jesus, we actually run further away from it.

There is something else that I see repeated in this passage a number of times. That this freedom that God brings is accompanied by joy. Verse 3 talks about joyous blessing and festive praise. In other words, real freedom brings real joy. Now we know happiness and we've experienced that on occasions, but real joy is something different. Real joy is unshakeable. It survives no matter the circumstance. In fact, I would put it this way, joy and happiness are different by the fact that happiness is an emotion while joy is a way of being. I think the best way to see this is by looking at the face of an infant and see them smile and giggle, you're moved by it aren't you? I have a few friends who have joyful babies. They exude it and you know what, when I'm around them, I can feel the things of this world melting away. I begin to feel joy and contentment. Its contagious.

Real freedom brings contagious joy.

This is what freedom does in our lives. It breeds joy. It breeds a new way of being and changes us from within. This freedom is meant to shatter the chains that bind us. Whatever chains they are. How many today are held captive by the chains of thing we thought would set us free but actually has us trapped? God is looking to break those chains. Those things bind our hearts and keep us from experiencing joy. God wants to break those chains. Then the captives and the prisoners he offers release. Again, we are often our own captives, doing things we know we shouldn't. God wants to break those chains today. The Apostle Paul even says that we were once slaves to sin. We were controlled by sin and yet now we are free! God wants to break those chains.

The freedom leads to...verse 4...is a restoration of all things. Those things that have passed away and been destroyed will be revived. Isaiah is talking about the restoration of Jerusalem, but it also points to the new kingdom of God. It points to the fact that we are made new. That WE were once desolate, but God restores us.

God's freedom restores us.

God's freedom is a precious gift to us. Jesus made that happen. When he read this scripture to and proclaimed that it had been fulfilled through him, it meant that Jesus changed everything and set us free from

the thing that most enslaves us, our sin. Our desire and our impulses to pursue selfish living places us in chains. God sets us free from that and offers us a new way of living. God offers this freedom to everyone.

Notice the end of the passage. It says that the people of Israel will rebuild that which was ruined. They will restore the broken things. In other words, their freedom will be used to create a new kingdom. They will have a part to play in building God's kingdom. Those who are free have a part to play in God's kingdom. We have been set free in order to break the chains of others.

We have been set free to break chains.

We realize this morning that everywhere men and women are in chains. That we live in a world that still profits from the exploitation of others. We live in a world where we have experienced being trapped, being held captive by our behaviors. We have felt the chains of addiction, the chains of selfishness in our lives and God wants to break those chains. He offers us freedom. Freedom to break those chains that bind us. To break the chains of others and to usher in a new Kingdom. A kingdom where God restores all things.

A kingdom where freedom brings joy.