

God Is Causing a Change

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

by Michael G. Lilienthal

Dear people of God,

Do you like the way things are? Are you perfectly content? Is there nothing in your routine, in your life, in the world that you would prefer if it were slightly different? If we really think about it, I think we know that there are things we would definitely want changed. The good news is that **God is causing a change**, and it's certain to be a change infinitely better than anything we could hope for.

But what is this change? What will it mean for us? How do we know anything about it? Of course, we read and hear about it in the Word of God. The argument to be made here is a moral one; it goes like this: we can all agree that there are problems in the world. From this common perspective we move on to prove that these problems inhabit also ourselves, that we ourselves are a part of the problem, part of the problem's cause. From this point it is not too hard to prove that the solution to these problems, perfection versus imperfection, is wholly unattainable by us who are so imperfect. Doom is the only possibility. And so we are left to flounder helplessly unless we receive aid from outside ourselves, unless the perfect could come in and make us perfect. And here is where God's Word comes into play, for in that place he has said that he "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4),

For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' [Joel 2:32] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' [Is. 52:7].... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:13-17)

Because he intensely desires our salvation, and because we are saved by faith, God himself cannot keep silent about the news of the change from damnation to salvation.

I. He Cannot Keep Silent About It

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world" (Heb. 1:1-2), "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). It is this mediator, this testimony-giver, this appointed and anointed one who speaks through Isaiah's prophecy: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; / my soul shall exult in my God." This chapter begins with a prophetic statement from this preincarnate Jesus:

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.
 (Is. 61:1)

Just look at this language: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me”; “the LORD has anointed me.” Here’s some very important language study for you: do you know what “anointed” is in Hebrew? מָשִׁיחַ – Messiah. What about in Greek? Χρίστος – Christ.

When did the Spirit of God come upon his anointed one, his Messiah, his Christ? We’ll read more about it next week: “and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove” (Luke 3:21-22). The baptism of Jesus was the occasion of his entering into his public ministry, his “clocking-in,” so to speak. St. Luke makes this explicit when he goes on in the next verse to describe Jesus at this occasion as “when he began his ministry” (Luke 3:23).

This also shows us what it means that this Messiah states about God, “he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; / he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Just as Jesus was baptized for *our* salvation, not his, so his very righteousness, which was his by virtue of being God, was worn by him as a robe and outer clothing, so that it could be visible to all, and thereby could be taken off of himself and given to those whom he saved. Because this salvation was to be transferred from him to his people, he greatly rejoices and exults.

In chapter 62 of Isaiah’s prophecies, God himself is speaking, and he says, “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, / and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet.” Because he earnestly desires his chosen ones to take ahold of the salvation he offers, he spreads his word out abroad, and this we have in written form as what we call the Bible, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from

God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), "the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:15-16). These sacred writings, this Bible, this Word of God is therefore as full of power as the original words God spoke at the creation of the world, when he "said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Therefore Jesus' prayer was not in vain when he prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). He prayed that God's Word, his truth, would accomplish sanctification, holy-fication, in his disciples, that those who heard the Word of God and were taught by it might be made holy, set apart, beautified, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

II. His People Are Beautified

Look at the beautiful language God uses through his prophet Isaiah to describe this beautification promised to us: he states that he won't be quiet "until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, / and her salvation as a burning torch." The preincarnate Christ just before, speaking of how he had been "clothed...with the garments of salvation" and "covered...with the robe of righteousness," described himself "as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, / and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." And further he prophetically describes:

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.

All these pictures mean the same thing. There are three things that are promised as a part of what we're calling "beautification": *salvation, righteousness, and praise.*

Salvation means just what it sounds like. For Isaiah's original audience, the Israelites who were exiled in Babylon, salvation meant rescue from their captors and return to their glorious city and Promised Land. But this comes with a spiritual meaning: our captors are the Devil, Death, and our Dreadful Sinfulness. Our glorious city and Promised Land are the New Heavens and New Earth, as foreseen by St. John: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:1-2).

There's our first picture. Remember, this Christ had said that he was "clothed" and "covered" with "salvation" and "righteousness, as a bridegroom...and as a bride." The Son of God came into human flesh, *wearing* these things, *clothing* himself in them at his baptism where he was anointed for this work, so that he could one day *take them off*, so that they could be given to another: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). He beautified the church, his believers, by marrying her, this beggar bride lifted out of

the muck of her own diseased death, washing her clean in baptism, dressing her in his “garments of salvation,” his “robe of righteousness.”

But this blessed beautification does not remain so inanimate,

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.

The preincarnate Savior of the world here prophesies something similar to his parable of the Sower and the Seeds. The earth here is mankind, and the garden which flourishes is the Church of Christ. The things which grow, the beautiful flowers, the healthy crops and fruitful trees, they are the inner righteousness which comes by virtue of one being saved; “The Holy Spirit renews [the follower of Jesus] with a daily sanctification so that in his new life of faith the Christian can offer good works as a thank offering to his Savior God.”¹ What once was dead is now alive, and a living thing is always either growing or dying. Therefore God himself continues to work in us to make us grow and remain alive.

But this blessed beautification does not remain invisible; rather

her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.
The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory.

As a popular children’s song puts it, “Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine!”² And Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be

¹ *Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism* (Mankato: ELS, 2001), 148.

² “This Little Light of Mine,” <<http://www.kididdles.com/lyrics/t030.html>>.

hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works," those good works which are caused by the Holy Spirit so that we can grow in righteousness because of the salvation won by Christ, "and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16). Like flowers in a garden are not meant to be hidden away, and crops from a field do far less good if they are left unharvested, "so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise / to sprout up before all the nations." We demonstrate our salvation, our righteousness, so that others see it, and are inspired to give us praise, and so that we can direct their minds away from us and towards our "Father who is in heaven," who sent his Son,

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.... Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this [message] that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:23-24, 33).

Therefore our beautification is described:

and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

As God changed the name of Abram, Sarai, and Jacob, as he foreordained the name of Jesus, all to mark his gracious purpose, our name is new. Our name is now no longer something that marks us as corrupted and dead in the fallen Adam (whose name means "man"), so no longer are we merely "man." Now we are called by the name of the

second Adam, the name of the anointed Christ – we are called “Christians,” and in this we are raised to new life with him, for his death won our life.

And we are a crown, a diadem. But interestingly we are not on any head. We are “in the hand of the LORD...in the hand of your God.” We are such a beautiful crown in his hands because he has been shaping us, working us, forming us, and inlaying jewels into us, all through the salvific work of his Son, and the sanctifying work of his Spirit. We are a symbol of the beautiful work and power of our heavenly Father, to be displayed to the world, but not yet placed on his head. This is the ultimate hope that we have to look forward to. The change from death to life was caused by God once when he sacrificed his Son on a cross, and then raised him to life on the third day. That change came into our hearts by faith when we heard the Word, when we were baptized. That change will be completed on the Last Day, when our King comes in glory to bring us into his kingdom, at our rightful place with him. This is God’s sure and certain promise.

Amen.