

**God's Great Gift Exchange Has Made His Church Holy**  
**Isaiah 61: 1-3, 10-1 + September 23, 2007 by Pastor Mike Helwig**  
**From the Message from the Master series, "I Believe in the Holy Christian Church"**

Remember those childhood gift exchanges? In my grade school days the popular boy present was cola and peanuts. But the kids who brought really neat toys were always afraid of ending up with peanuts in exchange for a model jet airplane. I suppose there were some exchanges that did not end up to evenly.

God designed his own gift exchange. We would have to agree that his gift exchange was bit lop sided as well. When we look at Isaiah's list of gifts that God has given to us in exchange what we might offer him, I can't help but think we got a pretty good deal. Continuing through our study of God's Kingdom, we are focusing on God's field this week. In exchange for the filthy rags of our sinful humanity, he has given us riches from his royal kingdom. In exchange for our humble, thankful rejoicing he has given us royal robes of righteousness.

### **1. Royal Riches for Rags.**

Isaiah really carries the voice of the Savior who says, **"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from the darkness for the prisoners."**

The Messiah, the Anointed Christ, was sent with a mission. His mission was one of good news. The poor would be made rich. The brokenhearted would be made glad. The prisoners would be set free.

We come to this gift exchange with sin. Isaiah says in a later chapter: **"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and our sins sweep us away"** (64:6). Born in sin, acting upon sinful desires, poor in holiness, lacking in spiritual blessing, we are nothing more than beggars before God, dressed in the poverty of our sinful chains.

Even the wrapping for our original sin is filthy. Our spiritual poverty is revealed selfishness. It is covered with laziness. It is wrapped up in depressing, negative attitudes toward ourselves and our neighbor. Sadly we feel drawn to our own filth and would even forfeit the wealth of heaven to wallow in the ways of this world.

This is why we come to this gift exchange crying "Be merciful to me, a sinner." God took our sinful filth, our spiritual rags of guilt and darkness, and replaced them with what he has for us. In a few chapters before Isaiah tells us, **"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"** (53:4-6) That is why God sent his Son to this world. In exchange for our sin, our God gives us the wealth of his heaven. He trades us our filthy rags of sin for the royal robes of justification in Christ Jesus.

That is what God means when he says, **"comfort those who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of despair."** Everything that causes sadness and fear – sin and death – has been placed on the cross of Christ. He has taken our burden away. He has punished sin on the cross. He has swallowed up death in victory. And since Christ has taken away sin, he replaced it with beauty, gladness, and praise.

God's beautiful riches are wrapped up in holy packages. They are dressed in a splash of water and the spoken name of the Triune God. In Baptism we are given the Spirit and faith in Christ. Remembering our Baptism we drown the rags of sin and open up the riches of forgiveness. God packages the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the death of his Son – the death we proclaim when he gives us his body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The song sung by mom and dad at bed time; the mediation read by grandfather in his den, the announcement of forgiveness between college roommates; these too, are the unsuspecting wrappings for the gems of Christ's blood and righteousness won for us on Calvary.

### **2. Royal Robes for Rejoicing.**

God's asks nothing in return. He prepares our hearts for thankful joy. We already come out on top of this exchange of royal riches for rags. Now that generous exchange moves the child of Christ to rejoice. In

the first chapter, Isaiah writes: **“Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”** God has dressed in the blood and righteousness of Christ. He has made us white and clean spiritually. He has wrapped us up in our Baptisms. He has placed divine royalty on our heads and around our humanity. He has planted us in his field and called **us oaks of righteousness to display his splendor.**

Dressed in those royal robes, we rejoice. Isaiah speaks out **“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”**

We are people who were spiritually bankrupt. We were orphaned Cinderella, slaves to the wicked stepmother. We were dead weeds in a mown field. But now in Christ we are made alive and are strong oaks of God’s handiwork. In Christ we are dressed in new wedding clothes and brought into the inheritance of Christ the Heavenly King. As such people, who’ve spiritually been brought from rags to riches, how can we not rejoice! How can we not sing! How can we not serve and live for our Gracious Host and King! How can we not be moved to say thank you with our hearts and hand and voices. Our whole lives are moved to humble service; in the kitchen at home, in the work place, in the classroom, in the day-to-day activities the God has blessed us to do in his field. This is our thank offering of joy to our Saving God. Rejoicing is all our Savior asks in exchange for his generosity.

I know there have been times, when I have felt as though the gift I got for someone else was far less valuable as the gift they had given me. Out of embarrassment, or maybe out of humble thanks, we wish we could go back to the store and get something else. But generosity and love never gives looking for anything in return. A genuine thank is all that is required when love inspires a gift.

Our God’s grace has inspired him to be generous to us. In Christ he has forgiven our sins. He has given us his truth, his protection, his love, and one day will give us the entire inheritance of his Kingdom. He has exchanged Royal Riches for Rags. He has exchanged Royal robes and asks only for rejoicing hearts and lives in return. I can’t think of a better example of our rejoicing. One might think, “What do I owe God now?” God’s answer is “Simple joyfulness will do.”

In our hymns we sing **“How can I thank you Lord for all your loving kindness?”** (CW 460:1). Also in our hymns we sing:

***Oh, Rejoice all Christians Loudly, For our joy hath now begun;  
Wondrous things our God has done ....  
See my soul your Savior chooses Poverty and weakness too;  
In such love he comes to you. Neither crib nor cross refuses  
All he suffers for your good To redeem you by his blood.  
Joy, oh joy beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness!  
Hence all sorrow and repining for the Sun of grace is shining! (CW 45:1-2)***