



## Formed for the City

Jonathan K. Dodson | Isaiah 61 | August 9, 2020

This summer we've sought to be formed in the presence of God. We considered what it means to be a people who engage in *belligerent prayer, meditate on the Scriptures, and withdraw into God's rejuvenating presence*. While God certainly wants us to experience personal renewal, he also calls us into urban renewal. Just as Jesus withdrew to desolate places to return to populated places. Our populated place, our city is crying out for renewal: Mike Ramos, Garrett Foster, 25% spike in domestic violence, record loneliness, anxiety. Eternal souls marooned from Christ. Austin needs a city-renewing church. What does it take? Isaiah 61 answers that question 3 ways: *who, what, how?*

### Who Renews?

CL exists to renew cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus. Where do we get this idea of city renewal? Isaiah 61:4 [They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities](#) (4). The word repair means *to make anew, restore*. It's to take something that has value—people, places—and restore it to its original or intended condition. There are a couple responses to this vision. To think too much of ourselves—*we got this*—or to think it's too great a task—*I'm too busy*. The person who says it's ***too great a task*** is right. An individual can't renew a city much less a block. God has given you a mission that requires more than you can handle, which is why it's tempting to throw up our hands, and make an excuse, I'm too busy. But busy doing what? Working hard and playing hard. What about to serving hard? City renewal cuts into me time, well-earned nights on the eastside, Sunday morning brunch. If we're not careful we'll just take life from the city not give life to the city. This urban consumerism among Xns alienated Adam Kotsko to the faith. In the literary journal *n+1* he writes, "[Our profoundly unjust and self-destructive society won't be changed by using the playbook of those who believe Jesus died on the cross so they could become good suburban consumers.](#)" Jesus didn't die on the cross so we could sit on the couche. So will you give up or change your answer to *who renews a city?* What about the person who says ***we got this***? Probably thinks too much of themselves. Urban renewal is a long, complicated, never-ending process. It has social, economic, political, infrastructure, and spiritual dimensions. It requires more than you

have to give. And even if you accomplish some measure of renewal, the city can be leveled in an instant by ammonium nitrate or a virus. So do you press on in blind optimism or change your answer to who renews a city? Jesus' first sermon was on Isaiah 61. He traveled to his home city, entered the synagogue, and stood up to read. He was handed an Isaiah scroll: *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 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.* Then he sat down, with eyes riveted upon him he said, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Lk 4:21). Who renews the city? *The Spirit-anointed Jesus.* Look: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me; he has sent me. *Jesus* renews the city. How does he do it? Being and proclaiming. *Being*: he stepped into the city, became an oppressed Jew, took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood, the condos, the apartments. Being engaged with the city. *Proclaiming*: he announced good news; he proclaimed the gospel message; he preached. Being and proclaiming. The way Jesus renews the city challenges all of us. To the *I'm too busy* he presents a model of being engaged, incarnate, in touch. Not enough to preach a message or show up on Sundays. To the *we got this* he says no you don't. You need a message more powerful than activism. But notice something. Jesus doesn't just preach the good news; he is the good news. He produces what he proclaims. Real, lasting city renewal comes through Jesus Christ. How so?

### What's Renewed?

What is renewed? First it is to the **poor**. In the book of Isaiah, the poor are those who are afflicted and oppressed. The word means bowed down. The nation of Israel had neglected widows, orphans, the bowed down: *For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong* (8). Jesus says, I have good news for you. I will lift you up. *Are you bowed down, are you struggling economically? Christ is for you...and so are we. Let us know and we will help you.* Austin Angels. Who among the bowed down will you extend Christ to? Second, Jesus is good news to the **brokenhearted**. The word means heart-shattered. Israel was in great despair, thinking God would never restore them. Jesus promises to bear up those who are

emotionally weighed down. To the lonely, the disheartened, the fellowship-starved, Jesus says, I will bind you up. I will take the pieces of your heart and put them back together. *Are you are broken by the heaviness of life in this season? Christ is for you; Christ is your comfort...and we want to comfort you. Let us know and we will weep and pray and point you to his perfect love.* I've seen people so depressed in this season they could barely get out of bed, but then they received a word of grace from Jesus and began rejoicing. I think of a person who drove to the parking lot of academy just to get out of the house and sang worship songs at top of lungs in their car. Christ is real renewal. Jesus binds up the brokenhearted. Third, he promises liberty to the ***captives***. This liberty is both physical and spiritual. In the ancient Near East an act of justice often occurred in the first or second year of a new king's reign, often by granting freedom to prisoners (like our presidents do). Labor for prison reform. But Jesus is also saying I'm the true King of the world and have come to set spiritual prisoners *eternally* free. This is why Isaiah says, "**for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness**" (10). *Are you weighed down by sin in need of redemption and forgiveness? Christ is for you. Do you know anyone that is spiritually captive, bound by the chains of sin? You have their freedom. The good news that Jesus suffered in their place to set them free of guilt and shame and to clothe them in righteousness.* Jesus heals the poor, the broken-hearted, and sets the captive free. He renews the city socially, emotionally, spiritually.

### **How to renew?**

How exactly does he do it? By **proclaiming the favorable year of the Lord**. In Lev 25 there was something called the year of Jubilee, a year in which liberty was to be proclaimed across Israel returning slaves to freedom, land to owners, a year of social, spiritual, cultural renewal. Jesus says I'm inaugurating this, not as a year *but as an age* in which he promises several things: a beautiful headdress instead of ashes. The ashes aren't what's left after you burn something; they're the "dust and ashes" of grief and repentance, of being so humbled you're brought facedown to the dust. Isaiah called Israel out for making too much of themselves, high and mighty, and he is calling us out for thinking too much of *ourselves*—*we got this*. He also confronts us for thinking renewal is too great a task—*I'm too busy*. Christ wants to confront us *and* lift us up, crown us with his beauty not leave us groveling

in ashes. It's a redemptive reversal. *Beauty* for ashes; *gladness* for sorrow; *praise* for fainting spirit. His Being is his proclaiming. He embodies the message. Jesus doesn't just replace the good with better, but the worst with the best. But to do it he has to suffer the worst to give us the best. Jesus facedown in the dirt as he's whipped; Jesus mourning at the tomb of Lazarus; Jesus spirit troubled at the thought of betrayal and the cross. He takes the sin, sorrow, and weakness of the world onto himself and is crushed by the worst of us to rise victorious from the grave to give us the best of himself. Christ is renewal. The *gospel* is good news. Redemptive reversals bring strength and joy: that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. It is these oaks that renew the city: They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall renew the ruined cities" (4). They who deserved the worst but received the best; who got beauty for ashes, gladness for sorrow, praise for faint spirit. Have you received his gladness, his beauty, his praise? Then be oak. Not a waify willow. Be a firm and sturdy presence—being and proclaiming—alongside Jesus. Who is brokenhearted? Reach out to comfort them? Who is bowed down? Lift them up? Who is spiritually captive? Give them freedom of Christ. *Let's renew the city socially, spiritually, and culturally for the glory of the Lord.*