

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
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**Jake Kirchner**  
**Three Seats in the New Year | Isaiah 61**

Good morning everybody! My name is Jake Kirchner, and I'm the Connections Pastor here at CPC. It's great to be with you this morning! Today I'm going to talk to you about three seats that we can take during the new year, but I'm not going to tell you what these three seats are yet, so you will just have to guess for now. We will get there. It's that time of year, isn't it? The time when we reflect on the year that has gone by and kind of see where we are. We look forward to the next year, and we may make some resolutions. I think it's interesting what happens when we do this reflection, right? We say *Hey, there are things I am going to stop doing, things I'm going to start doing, things I want to do more, things I want to do less...* and that's kind of how we figure out resolutions. I made a few resolutions myself this year. The first one is that I'm going to drink more water. That's a good one for me. I make it every year, so I'm up to nine gallons a day. It actually hasn't changed one bit...every year, drink more water, drink more water...this year is going to be the year. The other one is that I'm going to get more sleep. That's also a good one for me with the three little ones in my house. The busyness, the busyness...I'm going to get more sleep, more rest. Those are my two. Here's what some of yours might be. And I don't know if you know this, but it's hard to keep resolutions, isn't it? Thirty-two percent of you aren't even going to make a resolution this year. That means that around 60% of you might be making resolutions. Let's get some audience participation here, raise your hands. Who is making some resolutions this year? That's not quite what the statistics say. I think some of us aren't saying it's a resolution, but we are thinking we have some goals, some things we want to change. We don't want to talk about them too much. But here's the thing: there are three A's that have to do with having these resolutions stick. They are addition, announcement, and accountability. I don't know if you have heard of those, but they are based on some facts. It's easier to add something to your routine than to take something away. So that's addition. Then there is announcement, so if we say these things out loud, it helps us do it. And then there is accountability. This is my accountability—it's a Fitbit. I got it this year for Christmas. It tells me how I'm sleeping, and it has a little thing on the app that reminds me I should be drinking water. I need the app, because it's hard to keep resolutions.

I don't know about you, but for me there are these things that happen, circumstances change, right? You can say *I'm going to eat healthier*, and then someone brings those good donuts to the office...*ok, just this once*. And we start to wane a little bit. You know—*I'm going to spend less money*, and then that thing that we really wanted goes on sale, or something breaks in our house and all of a sudden that savings is gone. Or we say *I'm going to be more present with the most important people in my life so I'm going to put my phone down more and disconnect*, and then you get this link to a cool

video that's going viral and the next thing you know it's two hours on Facebook. Things slip away. I think part of why we don't always keep our resolutions has to do with what is driving those resolutions, what's driving some of our thinking, what's driving some of our behavior. Actually, a lot of our behavior looks like this cycle that we fall into. We say we are going to make some change, we're going to do something different—*I'm going to stop, I'm going to start, I'm going to do more, I'm going to do less*—and so we try harder to do that thing. And then we get some fatigue because we fall into those old routines. Change is hard, and then we quit. We feel bad for quitting and we start to feel guilty, so we say *You know what? That's it. I'm going to try harder*. And then we get fatigued, and then we quit, and then we feel guilty, and then we try harder, and fatigue, and guilt...and it goes and goes. And sometimes that cycle goes so long that soon we replace the guilt with shame—*You know what? I can't change. I'm no good at this. I'm not going to be any different*. And all that guilt and shame starts to drive us toward anxiety and depression and isolation and addiction and—name whatever else—shows up in your life. And it's hard because we really want to make these changes and I don't know about you, but for me, all of a sudden Master Yoda shows up in my head and tells me, "There is no try or try not; there is do or do not." That's kind of the philosophy we have in life. Driven by guilt we try harder, we do harder, we do more, we try more. That's how we live. And some of us in this room, with that anxiety, with that depression, think *You know what? This year is going to be different. I'm going to try harder*. My prayer for us—for you and for me—is that this year we would live less in the cycle of guilt and more in the promises of God.

We are going to spend a little bit of time reading through one of the chapters in a biography about Jesus written by a guy named Luke, so if you have your Bibles, please follow along, and if you are using one of the pew Bibles, we will be on page 1530. Here's what we need to know about Luke. Luke is writing to a group of people not unlike us. They didn't have Jewish heritage and religious background. They were people who were curious about this Jesus movement that was happening. They were close to trusting in the mission and the message of Jesus, so Luke is trying to bring clarity to who Jesus is, His message, and the movement that came out of what Jesus did. So, Luke is a good book for us who are seeking to follow after Jesus. In the story that we are picking up about Jesus today, there is a promise He gives us that recalls back to what Isaiah wrote. The prophet Isaiah was a spokesperson for God...we've been in this series called "Promise" about the promises that were written by Isaiah to God's people that point to Jesus, and Jesus refers to one of these in chapter 4. Now, there is a big space between what we celebrated last week and what we're going to talk about today. Last week we talked about the silent night and the manger and the star in the sky, and then all of a sudden the story fast-forwards. We don't know a lot else about Jesus except we know that His family went from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then He moved back north to a small town named Nazareth. And then we don't know what happens except one day Jesus kind of shows up with some friends. He's walking along when a guy named John, who is His cousin, sees Him and says, "Hey, this is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world." Jesus gets baptized and then He goes into the desert—forty days in the desert—and gets tempted by Satan. Then He comes back and

starts teaching and preaching all around the region, and that's where we pick up the story.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. <sup>15</sup> He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. [Luke 4:14-15]

He's getting a good reputation, good things are happening.

<sup>16</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. [Luke 4:16]

Something they did often. These are the people He grew up with that He knows and they know Him, and He shows up where they gather for worship. But here is what we need to know about Nazareth...Nazareth is a small little town. And we know from other accounts about Jesus that most people didn't have a good view of Nazareth. Nazareth had a bad reputation. One of Jesus' disciples even said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It's a little town and it's next to a big town that we actually don't hear about either. It's a big city, a cosmopolitan city where diverse people from all over the world are coming because this is kind of the Greek epicenter of the region. They have bath houses and gymnasiums and luxury—all the things that people want—and trade and customs, and so people from ethnic and culture and religious backgrounds show up in this town just six miles away from Nazareth. And that town is much different than the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is the epicenter of religious faith...the people trying to come to the temple to worship God and live this life that's worthy of being God's people with all their laws and their customs. And then there's the city up north next to Nazareth where soldiers come and set up their camps to help push back at any rebellion that was coming from the Jewish people. This town grows and grows and here's this little town of Nazareth just trying to hold on to their traditions of faith and the culture that they have of being God's people. Jesus shows up, and when He walks into the synagogue somebody hands Him a scroll. It's not like our Bibles now, our library of books that we call the Bible—they had scrolls. So somebody hands Him a scroll and Jesus has something in mind when He gets this scroll of Isaiah...He finds the place that this promise we are talking about today is found. Jesus said,

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners [Isaiah 61:1]

Now when we read this and hear this, most of us compartmentalize. We hear the poor, we hear the brokenhearted, we hear the captives, and they would have heard that too, but they would have seen a bigger picture. They would have seen these parts as part of a bigger picture of a whole that we have been talking about throughout the series: the

peace of God. We talked about peace at Christmastime, peace on earth. The peace of God was something they called Shalom—everything being set back to right, set back to how things should be, because the world is broken and needs to be set back to right. And that's what they would have heard. We have other words for it too. We might call it social justice—things going back to the way they should be. The people who are oppressed and who have had things withheld from them, they finally get the good that is coming to them. And for the Jewish people, those people in the synagogue, they would have been waiting for Jesus to finish the sentence that is written in Isaiah 61. Here's what the rest of Isaiah 61 says,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn.

Jesus stops short of that. He doesn't talk about justice against those who are oppressive, but He does talk about justice for. They don't necessarily pick up on it right away that Jesus left that out. Maybe they do, but they are in awe of what Jesus has said. He puts the scroll back, He sits down, and He starts to teach them. And He starts by saying, "Those words that I have read to you today in this scripture have been fulfilled in your hearing." Something stirs in them; they are awakening to this idea that maybe God finally has heard their cry of all this oppression that has been on them, not just since this city next door has been there, but years and years...400 years. You go back, they were one of the first regions to be oppressed. To be occupied. And now here is Rome doing the same thing. *We've been waiting for this. We've been waiting.* But then they start wondering, "Isn't this Joseph's son? Didn't he just live down the street from us and he came here every Sunday...and now he's talking about this stuff?" They start to get a little rattled and Jesus says *Be careful. Be careful. A prophet doesn't have honor in his hometown.* He's kind of warning them *What I'm about to tell you isn't going to go over very well.* And He gives them two stories of two people. He highlights these two people that go back hundreds of years before when Israel was first occupied and first taken captive. In the first story He talked about a woman who was a widow who is living on the fringes, not just of Israel's society, but outside in a foreign land and on the fringes of that society. And He said that when God's promises came, they didn't come to Israel, they came to that widow on the fringes of that culture. And if that didn't make them mad enough, Jesus then says, "And another time God's promises came and they didn't go to you being conquering heroes. Instead the promise of grace and forgiveness went to the commander of the army of your enemies. They had had enough when they hear these two things. The implication is clear. Jesus is saying *Hey, I know it feels like the promises are going to come your way, and they can and they will, but you are going to miss it because you don't see it...because it's not just for you; it is for the outsider too.* And they have had enough, and they stand up and they stampede out and they take Jesus to the edge of a cliff and they are going to throw Him over. That escalated pretty quickly. Jesus walks right past them, kind of wipes the dust off His feet.

Now here's the thing. I don't think any of us are in danger of throwing Jesus off a cliff, but I think we are in danger of missing what they missed, likely for different reasons. Because the promises of God are fulfilled in the presence of Christ. I don't know if you caught it...Jesus said, "In your hearing today, these promises have been fulfilled." They have been fulfilled. So that means the promises of God are fulfilled in the presence of Christ. Wait, not in the progress of His people? Like don't those people have to be out of oppression for those promises to be true? Don't they have to have worked their way into those promises coming true? They've been waiting long enough. Maybe for us it's not progress so much as productivity. The promises of God are not fulfilled in the productivity of His people, they are fulfilled in the presence of Christ.

There are two lenses that we tend to approach justice with. There is the lens of the victim, and the Israelites were victims for a long, long time. They had this single lens of being a victim, and when you have the lens of a victim when it comes to justice, you are wondering and wondering *When is justice going to be gained for me and people just like me, people who have gone through what I have gone through?* It's probably the right way to feel. Those who are privileged start to wonder *When is justice going to be granted?* The lens that we wear when we have the lens of privilege, which is the one we most often wear—not to say that some of us don't have the lens of being hurt and wounded and being a victim—but the lens of privilege is the other lens that we use to look at justice. This lens says that justice is something that is granted through our efforts. Granted through me and through us. And when it comes to how the kingdom takes place, those who have a victim lens say *I'm entitled to justice, aren't I?* And those who have the lens of privilege start to say *Well, we can be saviors too. It's dependent on us. The kingdom is going to be established through our efforts.* And soon both sides, no matter what lens, are in danger of defining justice on their own terms, in their own ways, with their own agendas. No matter what side we share, we start to wonder and start to get frustrated. And we are frustrated if we have the lens of a victim because we are wondering, *When is enough, enough? When is this going to end? When am I finally going to get the good coming to me? When are those people finally going to get the bad coming to them?* And those of us who have this lens of privilege, we say *When is enough enough? We give and we work together and we do these good things, and we have resources. When is enough enough? Why hasn't this changed?* And we start to wonder, *Okay, so what then? What are we supposed to do?* If we have these lenses and we are so worried about our progress and our productivity, and that's not what brings the promises of God—it's really the presence of Christ—then what should we do? And we are back at doing again. Let's do some more, do some more...That just seems tiring. So that's what I want to talk to you about—not getting busy doing more this new year, and instead just taking a seat. To just sit in these three seats.

There is a quote by Scott Sauls—from his book called *Jesus Outside the Lines* that we offered as a gift to every family this Christmas—about this predicament. Jesus wants to fix every thing that is broken about us and everything that's broken around us, but before He does this He wants us to know that He is with us and for us in what is broken

about us and around us. Jesus wants to be present. What if it's not about doing more? What if it's just about being present in Christ and with Christ?

Here's the first seat—the seat of the outsider. Who is the outsider for you? Right now the outsiders...in this very moment, there are people who are more comfortable in the places of entertainment in our world when they are looking for community and inclusion. A place to belong. It was clear for the Israelites who the outsiders were. The outsiders for us are the ones who are less comfortable coming here to find those things and more comfortable going out to the places that don't look like this. What does it look like to just sit with an outsider? And really, an outsider is anybody that you would just say “those people.” Maybe you wouldn't say it that way, but those people: those young people, those old people, those conservatives, those liberals, those this, those that...Maybe we wouldn't say it that way but it is anybody that we don't already treat like an insider, that we treat differently than those who are close and in proximity and in relationship with us. Let's think about it this way: it's the people that we try to fix and we try to fight or we try to forget. It's easy to think of the outsiders when we read these things about justice as people on the other side of the world. And I'm not saying those people aren't outsiders, but there are outsiders right next to us and around us. Maybe you are someone who says *I'm much more comfortable in that seat than this seat out here*. What does it look like for us just to be present with the outsider to hear a story, to hear a situation, to pay attention and listen?

Here's the second seat—it's the seat of silence. I like sitting on benches outside and I couldn't bring the outside in today. Here's one that's outside [shows picture]. I like sitting on benches and I probably won't do this for a little while, but once in a while when I have just a moment and I plan my day accordingly, or there is a little bit of free space or margin, I like to sit in silence. But we aren't good at silence; I'm not necessarily good at silence. It's hard to sit in silence, isn't it? When we get a moment of silence we go to our phone or we turn on some music. When we're in the car and finally get a moment of silence, we think *I'm going to listen to something else*. Or if it is silent and you just want to take a breath, all of a sudden that silence is filled by our own narratives of what we had happen to us earlier and how it should have gone and how it didn't go and how we want it to go, and our agenda fills that space. Or, that rage fantasy about how we are going to tell that one person that one thing...and we are probably never going to really say it that way, but we are playing in our mind this whole narrative that's going to happen. And I wonder if that's what happened to the Jews for those 400+ years where they were in the silence of God but they didn't experience the silence because they were busy building their own narrative? It's hard to sit in silence. There is a word for silence in the Old Testament—“Be still and know that I am God”—it's a famous psalm, a well-liked psalm. That word “be still” means to let go, to let loose. It's related to the same word that is used in this promise of God that says He is going to unbind those who are oppressed. It's amazing that the promise of God to let loose is usually the thing that we're gripping the tightest. The seat of silence.

The last seat is to sit at the feet of Jesus. I don't know if you noticed, and some of you can't see it, but there is a seat back here under the cross. To sit at the feet of Jesus...maybe that sounds like a really Christian cliché “churchy” thing to say. Of course we are supposed to sit at Jesus' feet, so now you're going to tell me to read my Bible more, pray every day...and maybe those things are good, but they are good. But we can go a week, and we can go a month, and we can go years of doing a lot of things that are “Jesus like” and never reflect on how and why Jesus matters. To sit at the feet of Jesus is to reflect on who Jesus is and why He matters. And that can happen in a lot of places and in a lot of different ways, and it does happen in a lot of places and a lot of different ways for us in this room, but a lot of times it doesn't happen and it's not a guilt trip and it's not try harder. There is this theory that you are most like the five people you spend the most time with...think about that for a second. Who do I spend the most time with? Who do I rub shoulders with? Because really, we can learn a lot about Jesus and talk a lot about Jesus, but it's really about rubbing shoulders with Jesus, rubbing shoulders with people that are like Jesus and show us what it means to sit at His feet. And this might be that place, and I'm not saying *Hey, we need to get tighter packed in here and rub shoulders a little bit tighter when we come here*. Maybe, but what does it look like to read and reflect, and to listen and to speak how and why Jesus matters in our lives? To share that with each other when we are in pews or when we go out there or we are in groups or we are out and about. What does that look like, to sit at the feet of Jesus?

Everything about Jesus, if we sit at his feet, and we learn from Him and we start becoming like Him—not just doing things like Him—eventually everything about Jesus in the scriptures points to the cross. This others-focused, self-sacrificial love of God displayed for us, when humanity is at our worst. So that the worst that we could offer God, and the perfect love that God shows us: at our worst God is at His best. He is most present in our world when we are going through the most suffering and we are causing the most suffering. That's what the cross displays for us. And then from there, the cross pushes us forward into this new life, into this resurrection life, and we start to see that the promises of God in the presence of Christ really are true, really are real, are really tangible to us—not because we are so busy doing, not because we have progressed as a human race, not because of all the production that happens, but because Christ is present in us and with us and among us and through us. What would it look like this year to say *You know what? It's not about my to-do list. Not going to try harder and try harder and feel guilty. I'm not going to keep trying to earn my efforts into this kingdom or cause the kingdom to happen through my efforts*. Those things might still happen. I'm not saying stop doing the things you are doing; I'm saying have this awareness, these eyes opened, that Christ is present in the outsider and in the silence and at the feet of Jesus.

What does it look like this year to stop living as if the promises of God are dependent on us and start living as if the presence of Christ is more than enough?

Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, it's easy to hear Your promises and want to get going on doing them...get going on joining with You and trying to backtrack, thinking we have a lot of stuff we need to work on. But Jesus, You show us through Your cross, You show us through Your word, through the story, that Your promises are fulfilled when You are with us. Jesus, we want to be with You. Awaken us to that. Keep us mindful of when You are at work. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*