

PM Isaiah 61:1-11 The Year of the Lord's Favour

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[0 : 00] Our first reading tonight in Isaiah 61 verses 1-11 found on page 151 in the Pew Bibles.

Isaiah 61 verses 1-11 on page 751. 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 prisons to those who are bound.

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion.

To give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes. The oil of gladness instead of mourning. The garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.

[1 : 13] That they may be called oaks of righteousness. The planting of the roaks of righteousness. The planting of the Lord. That he may be glorified.

They shall build up the ancient ruins. They shall rise up the former devastations. They shall repair the ruined cities. The devastations of many generations.

Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks. Foreigners shall be your ploughmen and vinedresses. But you shall be called the priests of the Lord.

They shall speak of you as the ministers of our God. You shall eat the wealth of the nations. And in their glory you shall boast.

Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion. Instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot.

[2 : 13] Therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion. They shall have everlasting joy. For I the Lord love justice. I hate robbery and wrong.

I will faithfully give them their recompense. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known among the nations.

And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them shall acknowledge them. That they are an offspring of the Lord.

That they are an offspring of the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exult in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation.

He has covered me with a robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress. And a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

[3 : 14] For as the earth brings forth its sprouts. And as the garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up. So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all nations.

If we turn to Luke chapter 4. 14 to 20. On page 1036. And a few rivals.

Luke chapter 4 verse 14.

And Jesus returned. Returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.

And he taught in their synagogues. Being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And as was his custom.

[4 : 34] He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.

And recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant.

And sat down. And the eyes of the synagogue were fixed on him. So we'll come before. A bit of a health warning this morning.

When I said we were going to be looking at passages in Isaiah today. And we looked this morning at Isaiah 42 verses 1 to 9 in particular. And this evening we're going to look at Isaiah 61 verses 1 to 11.

[5 : 35] So thank you for your hard work in listening and thinking about the passage this morning. I think it is good for us sometimes to have to think hard about the Bible's message. And the overarching story for God's people.

So again stick with me again this evening please. As we're going to work our way through another brilliant section of Isaiah. Let's pray again though and ask for God's help to understand and take in what we read.

Lord we ask that you would open our ears so that we may hear your voice. Open our minds so that we may receive your eternal wisdom.

Open our spirits so that we may know your leading and guidance. And open our hearts so that we may receive your hope, joy and love.

Amen. The book of Isaiah helps us to see how God has been at work dealing with his people in the past.

[6 : 42] How he communicated with them about future events. And how he rules over the affairs of the nations. You might remember I said this morning that chapters 1 to 39 are set in the context of northern Israel being overrun by the Assyrian Empire.

As I mentioned the city of Jerusalem in the south was itself miraculously delivered at that time. Because King Hezekiah and the people put their trust in God. But chapter 39 ended with the warning that the Babylonian Empire was coming.

And chapters 40 to 55 then looked forward prophetically to a time when several hundred years later the people would be in exile in Babylon wondering if their God would do anything to help them. Chapters 40 to 55 answer that question. They remind the Jewish people that God is so much greater than the idols and the false gods of Babylon. God's judgment is coming on the Babylonian Empire and the exiles will be allowed to return home.

Jerusalem and the temple will be restored. Chapter 55 concluding that section invites the people to turn to their God for help.

[8 : 04] To seek the Lord and the deliverance that he provides. Particularly when it comes in the form of God's chosen servant. The suffering servant. Described in the four servant songs.

Scholars are divided then as to whether chapter 56 begins an entirely new section of Isaiah. Or whether chapters 56 to 66 are still part of the second section.

It doesn't really matter. There does though seem to be a shift in emphasis as we move into chapters 55 through to the end. So post-exile theological questions are now being addressed.

Because even after the return from exile. The failure of Israel and their sin will continue. They will continue to fail to be the people of God that they're supposed to be.

And yet God still holds out the promise of true deliverance. God ultimately has a wonderful future for his people.

[9 : 08] And for the nations. That's what chapters 56 to 66 seem to be about. We're going to look this evening particularly at chapter 61.

In the middle of that section. And especially verses 1 to 3 of chapter 61. Because these three verses form the very heart of this section of Isaiah.

There's a careful structuring of the text and the chapters around. To sort of make verses 1 to 3. The middle, the centre and the most important statement in this part of the book.

So let me again read to you these wonderful words. Isaiah 61. And I'm going to read verses 1 to 3 again to begin with. 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 broken hearted. To proclaim liberty to the captives. And the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

[10 : 10] To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn. To grant to those who mourn in Zion. To give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes.

The oil of gladness instead of mourning. The garment of praise instead of a faint spirit. That they may be called oaks of righteousness. The planting of the Lord.

That he may be glorified. Let me take you through those verses just a wee bit more slowly. Verses 1 to 3. And this is my first heading. The anointed one announces good news.

The anointed one announces good news. We saw this morning as we looked at the second section of the book of Isaiah. The focus was on a coming servant as the bringer of God's deliverance.

Now the deliverance or the descriptor given to this figure is the anointed one. The anointed one. From which we get the title Messiah or Christ.

[11:19] Verse 1. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. God's Holy Spirit is going to rest on the person being described here in a special way.

He's going to be anointed. Set apart for a special task. The sovereign Lord has chosen him and appointed him to do something. Isaiah is using prophetic language here.

Putting the words into the mouth of this coming figure. So this future anointed one describes or proclaims his role. He talks about what he's going to do. What is it he's been appointed to do?

Well the verse continues. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Jews for whom these words were first written were reaching the end of their time in exile in Babylon.

Or possibly had recently returned from exile. And they were living among the ruins of Jerusalem. They maybe didn't feel that there was a whole lot of good news going around.

[12:26] There wasn't much to celebrate. But God says through his servant Isaiah that the coming anointed one will bring good news. Good news to the poor.

Probably not just poor in a material sense but poverty in all sorts of ways. Poverty of spirit. So those who are broken. The downtrodden. Those feeling excluded or walked over.

Good news for those with little hope. Good news for those with few rights. Just like the captives in Babylon or the returning exiles.

The verse continues. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted. What a powerful image.

Imagine if you were holding out a fragile, precious, vulnerable heart held out in front of you.

Your emotional center. And someone comes along and rips it out of your hands and drops it on the ground and stamps on it. It's a broken mess. And that's exactly how we feel sometimes.

[13:35] Our hearts are broken by the things that happen to us. Like a precious vase smashed on the ground. But God binds up the broken hearted.

He wraps them around with his love. He is the restorer of souls. The healer of emotions. And maybe today it's just good for you to hear that.

And to allow God by his spirit to bind up your broken heart. This anointed one will also proclaim liberty to the captives.

And the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Again, images that the exiles can relate to.

They know all about being captives. They know what it is to be taken at someone else's pleasure.

They probably weren't literally prisoners kept in a dungeon. But that is the image, you know, a prisoner being led out into the light. After having been imprisoned in a dark underground cell.

[14:37] Verse 2. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Instead of judgment upon Israel and their sin. Now is the day of the Lord's favor. His goodness is directed towards them.

They are to be recipients of his blessing and his favor. But it's also the day of vengeance of our God. In other words, the day when the wrongs done to God's people will be overturned.

When the suffering of the Lord's people will be avenged. Vengeance maybe doesn't sound a very nice word. But for those who really know what it is to suffer.

It's good news. God, the just judge of all the world, will do what is right. He will right the wrongs in the end. The anointed one, we're told, will also comfort all who mourn.

And grant or provide to those who mourn in Zion. You might call to mind the words of Psalm 137. By the waters of Babylon.

[15:44] There we sat down and wept. Other Psalms like it. It's important, isn't it, that we have space for lament within our worship. That's one of the great things about singing Psalms.

The writer of Psalm 137 is lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. Mourning. And even among those returning from exile, there were many who were filled with grief over what remained of the destroyed Jerusalem city and the Jerusalem temple and ruins.

Zion, the holy city of the Lord. It was walls and temple fallen down. But yet Isaiah says there will be comfort for those who mourn.

And good provision for those who find themselves grieving amidst the ruins of Zion. The anointed one is going to provide for them. Verse 3. He's going to provide a beautiful headdress.

Or a crown of beauty for their head. Mourners in Israel would have taken off their head covering and put ashes on their head as a sign of grief.

[16:54] The loss of a loved one. Brokenness over sin. Just as a sign of their repentance. The Jews, their leaders, would have torn their robes, put ashes on their heads as a sign of mourning, sadness, devastation.

But the coming anointed one changes all that around. He takes the spirit of despair and he replaces it with the oil of gladness. Like the oil of anointing poured over the head of the priest.

Instead of the torn robes is a new garment. Verse 3. A new robe of praise. Instead of ashes as a head covering, it's a beautiful crown. Joy, beauty, praise.

That's what the anointed one ultimately brings about. Despair and mourning turned to joy and gladness. Now while these verses might be in a language that might be understandable, will be understandable by the people of Israel in exile.

Or those recently returned from exile. It's clear that these words do not find their full fulfillment in the events that followed the coming back of the people to Jerusalem.

[18:13] As the chapters around these verses make clear, the problem of Israel's sin had not actually been dealt with. The failure of God's people to live in the way they should has not been changed.

And while there may be some measure of freedom from physical poverty, the problem of spiritual poverty still remained. And while there were some good things that happened, like the walls being rebuilt around Jerusalem and worship restarting in the temple after the people returned from exile. Still, it could not really be said, end of verse 3, that the people in Jerusalem ever came to be called oaks of righteousness. A planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

Or that he may be glorified, end of verse 3. God's people in Israel were never mighty, towering trees of righteousness displaying the Lord's splendor for all the nations to see.

And so these words, these promises of blessing in Isaiah 61, they can only really be fulfilled in another way. They can only be fulfilled ultimately in another sense and at another time through the coming of the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

[19:31] Who truly deals with the problem of sin. Who truly clothes God's people in righteousness and helps us to live for God's glory. And hence, we find ourselves turning to Luke chapter 4 that was read for us earlier as well.

And the start of Jesus' earthly ministry. Let me read these verses to you again. Luke's Gospel.

Chapter 4, beginning at verse 14. So this is after Jesus' baptism and his testing in the wilderness.

Verse 14. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogue, being glorified by all.

And he came to Nazareth, where he'd been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue at the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[20:38] He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives. And recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed in him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

So Jesus claiming the words of Isaiah 61 verses 1 and 2 as the declaration of his own ministry.

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. I am the Spirit-filled, anointed one described in the prophet Isaiah.

I'm the one who proclaims good news to the poor. Freedom for prisoners. Recovery of sight to the blind. And freedom from oppression.

Jesus says, My coming inaugurates a new world and a new way of relating to God and to one another. I announce to you the arrival of the kingdom of God.

[21:45] I am the coming servant. The foretold king. The anointed one. Spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. The one who will truly deal with the problem of sin.

And enable God's people to live as they should. And we see that promise beginning to be worked out in Jesus' ministry. He teaches, Blessed are the poor.

And blessed are those who mourn. For they will be comforted. He announces good news to those who are in despair. Again, not just to those in material poverty.

But to those who are poor in the broadest sense. Poor in spirit. Poor in terms of brokenness and exclusion. A whole range of social, economic, religious factors. Leading them to have no sense of worth or hope.

And we see Jesus reaching out to such people, don't we? Reaching out to the lost. To the marginalized. The sinful. And he says, Come to me. He heals the blind.

[22 : 49] Literally. He touches the eyes of the blind man. And suddenly he can see. It feels to me reading through the Gospels that Jesus healed quite a lot of blind people.

Maybe that's because the Gospel writers particularly record those miracles. Because of the obvious link with spiritual blindness. Jesus demonstrated his power to heal physical blindness.

But of course what we need most from him is to heal our spiritual blindness. And I can't think of an occasion when Jesus proclaimed freedom for a prisoner.

Literally. Verse 18. But there were certainly lots of times when he freed people from demon possession. Or from crippling illness. Or even from the bonds of death.

And so Jesus coming makes a colossal difference to our lives. We see the signs of the kingdom breaking in. Some Christians though have a particular way of interpreting these verses in Isaiah.

[23 : 57] That are quoted here in Luke. They've got a particular way of interpreting these verses.

That places a big emphasis on Jesus being the one who brings about liberation for oppressed peoples.

And an encouragement to look to Jesus today. To bring about in this world freedom from oppression. Justice for the poor. And an overthrowing of the corrupt and dominant powers and empires.

Such a liberation theology probably provides a helpful corrective to a traditional western focus on a more spiritual salvation.

And encourages us to work for the kingdom of God now. My problem though is that I don't think that these words in Isaiah 61 are ultimately describing an improvement in this current world.

While the coming of Jesus to poor and deprived communities today does sometimes bring about social and economic transformation. I don't think it's the lasting and totally radical transformation that the prophet Isaiah is speaking of.

[25 : 06] Don't hear me wrong. I think it is really important for Christians today to be involved in alleviating material poverty. Both locally through things like food banks.

And globally as we give our money to relief agencies. It's good for Christians to work to free people from addiction. Or to free people around the world from modern day slavery.

It's good to campaign for justice and to try and change corrupt systems and global practices. That oppress the poor and vulnerable. We do what we do what we can to demonstrate the kingdom of God today.

But I don't think that these words in Isaiah will ultimately be fulfilled in this world. Just as with the people returning from exile to Jerusalem who experienced some physical blessing.

I think that any earthly fulfillment of these words in a physical sense in our day will be short lived. There's too much sin and greed and corruption for it to last.

[26 : 16] The bigger problem of sin just it needs to be addressed. Evil needs to be properly removed from this world. And therefore what we ultimately supremely need even right now as the people in this world is rescued from our spiritual poverty.

Freed from our bondage to sin and the devil. Through Christ. And the opening of our blind eyes to the truth of the gospel. John Piper, a well known American minister visited Scotland a few years back.

And I remember his excellent headings in a very short talk. He said that number one, Christians care about all suffering.

Especially eternal suffering. And number two, Christians care about all injustice. Especially injustice against God. We care about suffering and injustice in this world.

But we care even more about eternity and the glory of God. What Isaiah is ultimately pointing us towards is the need right now for spiritual salvation.

[27 : 35] Freedom from spiritual bondage now. And then entrance into the eternal kingdom of God. Where we will eventually see these promises finally fulfilled physically.

Christ offers us freedom to all. Offers freedom to all of us. When you and I turn to him for salvation. He sets us free from bondage to sin. He opens our eyes to see the truth of his love. He binds up our broken hearts. Fills us with deep and lasting joy and praise.

And places a spiritual crown of beauty on our heads. Can I encourage you to go home and read chapter 65 of Isaiah as your homework.

The last part of Isaiah chapter 65 in particular. It describes how ultimately it will be in the renewed heavens and earth that the kingdom of God is fully realised.

[28 : 40] That these things in Isaiah 61 are fully fulfilled physically. In that day there will be an end of all physical suffering. True freedom from all things that oppress us.

And all the brokenness and all the things that cause us to weep. Including our sin. One day we will be truly free. It will be in our eternal dwelling with God in the new heavens and earth.

That we fully experience God's provision and favour. Joy. Praise. Righteousness. And beauty.

Let me turn then just briefly though to the remaining verses in this chapter. And my second heading. God's people as a light to the nations. God's people as a light to the nations. Verses 4 to 11. As I ended at the beginning.

[29 : 43] Verses 1 to 3 form the centrepiece of chapters 56 to 66. So the themes converge on either side to this point. You know just like a triangle. So starting on either side.

With describing the continued sinfulness of God's people. And moving through the recognition that only God can transform his people. To the message that God's people once they are transformed will live such attractive lives.

That people from all nations will come to worship the Lord. And experience the reign of the anointed one. So as we move now into verses 4 to 11 of chapter 61.

And in fact through to the end of chapter 62. Isaiah is talking about God's blessing resting on his people. Such that they become an attractive witness to the world.

So God's transformed people function as a light to the nation. Like a lighthouse on the edge of a cliff. Shining out brightly. And attracting people who want to come.

[30 : 47] Let me just take you quickly through these verses. Verses 4 to 11. Verse 4. They shall build up the ancient ruins. They shall raise up the former devastations. They shall repair the ruined cities.

The devastations of many generations. Again using the language of rebuilding cities after the destruction of war. So this connects with the exiled people coming back.

God promises blessing for his people in these terms. Verse 5. Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks. Foreigners shall be your plowmen and vine dressers. So that's either in the sense of people from other nations wanting to help the community of God's people.

Or in the sense of God's people no longer being at the bottom of the pile. They no longer have to do the lowliest of jobs. Rather verse 6. They will be called the priests of the Lord.

They shall speak of you as the ministers of our God. Now that was the original intention for God's people. That God's people would be a kingdom of priests. A holy nation declaring the praises of God.

[31 : 51] A promise actually that gets specifically transferred to the church in 1 Peter chapter 2. Verse 6 continues. God's blessing being described using material language.

Abundant provision resulting in everlasting joy. Verse 8. For I the Lord love justice. I hate robbery and wrong.

I will faithfully give them their recompense. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. In other words God doesn't go back on his promises. He doesn't short change his people.

He doesn't wrong them. Perhaps in contrast to the behaviour of his sinful people. God is faithful to his promises. He does it. Verse 9.

And their offspring shall be known among the nations and their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them shall acknowledge them that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.

[33 : 09] And that's very much the main idea here. God blesses his people so that they can be a witness to his redeeming love. People look at God's people and see that God has done great things for them.

And they're attracted to that. They too want to join the community. They want to become one of God's people. And yet again that's an idea that's never fully fulfilled for the Jewish people. They never entirely witness to God's love in a way that's attractive to the nations. But it's something that is at least partially now being fulfilled through the new people of God. As we the church, as we today as Christians witness to God's redeeming love in Christ. And what God has done for us. And people from all nations are drawn into the community of faith. The light of Christ shining through us to the nations. And one day we will be the fully transformed community that we ought to be.

[34 : 17] Verses 10 and 11 of the conclusion of this chapter could be understood I suppose here as being further words from the anointed one. Verses 1 to 3. But I wonder if it might be easier to understand them as being the song of God's people.

So this is our response. As recipients of God's grace clothed in his righteousness. We respond in praise to our God. Verse 10. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord.

My soul shall exalt in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress.

And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 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. God the sovereign Lord is working out his purposes.

[35 : 21] He's bringing about his plan of salvation. Through his chosen servant Jesus. He has brought about our forgiveness and redemption. He's taken Christ's righteousness and placed it on us.

On you and me. Making us as his people into a beautiful bride for his son. Not because we earned it or deserved it.

Or achieved it by our own efforts. But simply because of his mercy and grace. Even if these final verses are supposed to be understood as the words of the Messiah.

There's still a song of praise to God for all that he has done. And because of that. It's the light of Christ that shines through us.

His people. As a beacon to the nations. And to the glory and praise of almighty God. Isaiah 61 is good news.

[36 : 26] Good news. Good news. Good news. Good news for God's people. Israel returning from exile. But greater. Fuller. Better news for God's people today. For God's church.

For his children in Christ. Good news proclaimed to the poor and the downtrodden. Good news for God's people. Good news for the broken hearted.

Good news for the captives. And the prisoners. For those who mourn or would otherwise be in despair. The day of the Lord's favour has begun.

Christ has covered us in his righteousness. And God's glory and splendour is being displayed through his church. One day we are going to enjoy our full and final redemption.

As Jesus the Messiah. The anointed one. Leads his people into their eternal home. And then all mourning will truly give way to joy. And all despair will give way to praise.

[37 : 31] We as Christ's bride will be crowned with beauty. Instead of the ashes. All these things from chapter 61. We will experience in full. God's provision and blessing.

And everlasting joy will be our crown. Until that final day. Maybe you could join me in praying.

That God would help us. Individually. And as a church. To witness to his love. In an attractive way. That like Jesus the Messiah.

We too would be anointed with the spirit. To proclaim. The good news. Of God's salvation. Let's pray together.

Lord God thank you. For these words from the prophet Isaiah. That we've been looking at. This morning and this evening. Thank you for the beautiful language.

[38 : 33] And images that these verses contain. We maybe struggle to get our heads around them a bit. And to completely understand. What all the various phrases refer to.

But we thank you that they speak. Of a coming anointed one. A coming servant. Who will proclaim good news. To all those who are in need of help. And thank you that in Christ Jesus.

You have provided us. With your chosen. And anointed one. And that through him. You have worked out our salvation. And that you guarantee.

Our life with you. In the kingdom. That is yet to fully come. Until that day. Help us. Help us like Jesus. To witness to your redeeming love.

And to proclaim to the nations. To the people around us. To the people we come into contact with this week. To proclaim the good news. Of your salvation. And redemption. And all that we are looking forward to.

[39 : 35] To the praise of your glorious name. Amen.