

God's Anointed Servant

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Date: 18 October 2015

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now for a short time to Isaiah chapter 61 and we'll look at verses 1 to 3 of this passage.

Isaiah 61 verses 1 to 3. 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.

And so on down to the end of verse 3. The person speaking in this passage is not the prophet himself.

It's not Isaiah himself who's describing himself as anointed by the Lord with the Spirit of God. Jesus deliberately chose this passage, as we read in the Gospel of Luke, on that occasion when in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, the scroll was given to him of the prophet Isaiah.

Now the scroll would have been something that the Jews, as they do to this day, go through systematically. So that, in fact, the readings are very regular.

[1 : 17] They just follow through the scrolls of the Old Testament right through in a cycle and then back to the beginning again. And that would have been the case in the Lord's day, certainly.

So that it's pretty remarkable timing. And, of course, it's God's timing that it so happened that that particular Sabbath day, the section for reading, was the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

And Jesus, we told there, found where it was written that the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor and so on.

So this is the passage that the Lord actually chose. And when he handed it back to the attendant, he then said to the gathered people in the synagogue today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Just imagine the impact that must have made. Because what Jesus was effectively saying was, actually, this passage is about me. I'm the one of whom the prophet spoke.

[2 : 27] I'm the one prophesied about. I'm the one anointed with the Spirit of the Lord for my ministry. To carry out what God has given to me as a servant to be accomplished.

And in that chapter in Luke, you remember that as we read the few verses in the previous chapter about his baptism, where the Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and came to rest upon him.

Where you then find that he came back from that into, to face his temptation in the wilderness.

Being full of the Holy Spirit, he returned from Jerusalem and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness or in the wilderness. And when he was finished that temptation having overcome the devil, we read then that he returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

And it's then following that, that you have this incident in the synagogue where he found this passage that has to do with the Spirit of God, having been anointed with the Spirit of God for his ministry.

[3 : 39] There was Jesus at the very beginning of his public ministry. And there he was finding in the Old Testament these words about himself and about him being anointed with the Spirit of God for his ministry.

In other words, the Lord saw his ministry on earth in terms of this passage of Isaiah. The Lord quite clearly understood this prophecy of Isaiah to particularly and appropriately apply to himself at that exact point in his ministry.

But if you're listening carefully to the reading of what was taken there by Jesus from Isaiah, you'll notice that he actually stopped reading at the point where you come to the word favor.

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That's as far as he went in the synagogue. Now there's more to the passage as you see here in Isaiah. That too was very deliberate on his part.

Because the year of the Lord's favor is set beside here, the day of vengeance of our God. And at that precise moment, in the experience of the Lord, in the ministry of the Lord, he was setting out on his ministry.

[5 : 03] The day of vengeance was not relevant yet. Because what he had come to do, primarily, was not to condemn or to exercise vengeance, but to save.

He had come into the world to save sinners, as he himself put it. So it was appropriate that at that stage of his ministry, he would stop there and say he'd come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That didn't mean that the rest of it didn't apply to him. But the day of vengeance is the day of his second coming. And that wasn't appropriate yet at the beginning of his public ministry.

You see how exactly, not only did the passage actually fit with the Lord's circumstances and the stage he was at, it also shows how expertly and how well the Lord himself understood these words of the Old Testament and applied them in that very appropriate, selective way to what he knew then was his position.

So here is the Lord's servant. This is a prophecy about Jesus Christ as the servant of God and as the New Testament shows of God the Father.

[6 : 21] First of all, it talks about the servant of the Lord anointed. These passages in the section of Isaiah have to do with the servant of the Lord all the way through from chapter 42.

There you find, Behold, my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him. Same reference there to the spirit being put upon him.

This is the servant of the Lord. This is the servant king. This is the king as the servant. And the final part of Isaiah switches to the servant changing into the anointed king, the exalted king, the glorious king, which takes you beyond the life and the ministry of Jesus up to his death and resurrection and has to do with what follows and with his being exalted and being the king over all things.

Well, that's just by the way, but here is God's servant anointed. And then it also tells us in verses 1 to 3 about the ministry of God's anointed servant and what that contained.

We'll just look at that briefly as well. Now, you notice, first of all, an important distinction. We're not going to spend time on that, but it says here, The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

[7 : 39] There's the servant of the Lord actually saying the spirit of the Lord is upon me. And you can see he's distinguishing himself from the Lord that he's mentioning.

He's mentioning the Lord God, and he's distinguishing himself from the Lord God, because he's saying the Lord God has placed his spirit upon me.

And, of course, that takes you into the very being of God as triune or as a trinity of persons, which the New Testament and especially the Gospel of John has so much of that in the ministry of Jesus, as John records it.

It's very much a ministry that involves his relationship with God the Father, the distinction between them and that the unity between them, the oneness between them. They're not two gods there in the mystery of God's being, two persons, each with their own role in our salvation, and yet not two gods but one God.

And that distinction is right there in the text. But it's interesting what he calls the Lord here. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me. The word God there is the Hebrew word Adonai, Adonai, which really means master or something to do with the sovereignty of God.

[9 : 01] God as the master goddess, the sovereign one. And to that he's connected the word Lord, which is the word Yahweh or Jehovah, which is God's covenant name.

And what you see is happening there is important. So much as we see as we go along through the Old Testament and indeed of the New Testament, it goes back to this critical moment of the Exodus and what happened at the Exodus and immediately before the Exodus and in the Exodus itself, where God rescued his people and overthrew their enemies, where there was, if you like, the day of salvation, the year of salvation, and the day of vengeance.

And the pattern in the Exodus is actually brought into this phrase, the Lord God, this title. Because what Isaiah is really saying is, this is what the servant's testimony is.

This is the God that has anointed him, this great God of the Exodus, this covenant God, but who is great in might so as to deliver his people and deliver them from the hand of those who kept them captive.

This is the God who has anointed me, is the servant's testimony. The Lord God has anointed me. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

[10 : 19] And that's so critically important because in terms of who this God is, everything to do with the servant's ministry is about the Lord's purpose in redemption, the Lord's purpose in saving his people, the Lord's activity, informing a people for himself to be his covenant people.

And it's through the work of the servant that that has been accomplished. And you see here that, of course, he's anointed as well. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me.

And if we turn to John's gospel, you can see right at the beginning there, in fact, I think we mentioned that this morning, if I'm not mistaken, we read it this morning, at least nearby it.

In John's gospel, chapter one, where John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. After me comes a man who ranks before me because he was before me.

And John bore witness, I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remaining on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 46] And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God. There's so much in that. But notice especially that twice there, John records what John the Baptist heard and was told by God.

It didn't just say, God didn't just say to him, The one on whom you see the spirit descend, that is the Messiah. That's the Savior. There's more than that.

The one on whom you see the spirit descend and remaining on him. That's one of John's great words. It's absolutely packed with theology.

The word abide. Abide. You go through the Gospel of John and look at the number of times you find the word abide or remaining sometimes in the more modern translations.

Abiding. Abiding in Christ. Christ abiding in his people. Abide in me and I in you. Without me you can do nothing.

[12 : 49] Without abiding in me. And the abiding that John is mentioning, there is the abiding of the spirit. The spirit did not just come down upon him temporarily, it abode on him.

It remained on him. The spirit of God was given him so as to be the endowment by which the Son of God in our nature carried out his ministry.

And that's what's prophesied here in Isaiah many hundreds of years before. The spirit descending and remaining on him is the same one that Isaiah spoke of.

And you recall also there in John's passage there that John the Baptist was actually told that this person who you're going to see anointed with the spirit and the spirit remaining on him.

It is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus who receives the Holy Spirit so that he will then give the Holy Spirit in consequence of his work.

[13 : 57] You see, we often forget that the coming of the spirit of God into our hearts, into our lives, which we know happens when God takes us and changes us and gives us his spirit to live in us.

We often forget that that great gift was bought for us by Christ in his death. The book of Acts makes it clear that on the day of Pentecost, when Peter was preaching and explaining to them what had happened in that coming of the spirit on the day of Pentecost in such great power.

It is this Jesus, he said, who was crucified by you, whom God raised from the dead. He has poured this out. We don't manufacture the spirit of God by our efforts to remain in us, to abide in us, to come to minister to us.

We don't have the control of the spirit of God as some people might suggest to you, that if you follow out certain steps, then the spirit of God will actually come into your heart or will come with more power.

He's in the hand of, this is in the hand of the master who is Christ himself. The servant of God came to be endowed by the spirit so that having accomplished his work by that spirit, he would actually bestow the spirit onto his people.

[15 : 25] That's who we're dealing with, this great God, this great savior. Not only is it the great God of the exodus that has endowed his servant with the spirit of God, but it is that great spirit, that great son of God, that great servant of God who endowed with the spirit actually bestows the spirit upon his people and their redemption.

who do you thank for having the spirit of God? Who do you thank for the ministry of the spirit in your life? Who do you thank that you know something of the spirit of God, his regenerating power, his sanctifying power, his guiding power, his protective power?

Who do you thank for that? You thank Jesus. You thank the servant of God. But you go back from that and you thank the father because the father sent him and the father endowed him and the father bestowed his spirit to be upon him as a servant so that he would accomplish this great work of redemption.

The servant anointed. But what is the servant's ministry? Why is he anointed? What is it that he's come to do? The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor or to preach good news to the poor.

That's the first thing he says and it's in a place of importance, a place of first importance indeed. It's to proclaim or to preach good news to the poor. That's the gospel.

[17 : 08] The gospel is not bad news. We don't come to people who don't know the Lord or don't know the gospel and say to them, look, I've got bad news for you. And then you begin to explain to them that they're sinners, that they're under God's wrath.

Yes, of course, all of that comes into it. These things are important. But that's not the primary emphasis. The good news is that God has life for you. That God has redemption for you.

That God has forgiveness for you. I have come, he said, to bring, to proclaim good news to the poor. And the poor are essentially, not just those who are economically poor, although that's part of the Old Testament picture.

The poor are really essentially the disadvantaged who don't have the wherewithal or the resources to extricate themselves from their poverty, from their circumstances.

And of course, you carry that with you into the poverty of sin and the poverty of sinfulness, the poverty of the sinner. We'll see in a minute how he talks about releasing those who are captives and bringing joy instead of mourning.

[18 : 22] And all of that is related to sin and very directly the consequence of sin. The mourning, the sadness, the heaviness, the poverty, the way in which we are disadvantaged, but we are powerless to take ourselves out of it.

And that's where God's good news comes into such prominence and such importance to us that God has done that very thing. that God has come in the person of this Savior, in the person of this servant of his, that God has actually anointed his servant for the very purpose of bringing good news, that there is release, that there is redemption, that there is salvation, that there is forgiveness, that there is acceptance.

And that is the good news. People need good news. Sinners need good news. This world is full of bad news. You've got bad news every day before you.

News to do with death, with violence, with corruption, with greed, with all the things that really fill people's lives with misery. And here is, amongst all of that, this great good news that's above every other item of news.

I know you don't often hear it on your news channels, and you don't often hear anything about it in terms of its effect or its reality, but that is what God is saying. This is my servant.

[19 : 55] This is my servant, my son, as the servant, I sent into the world. And it's all about good news. You're a sinner tonight. I'm a sinner.

We're lost sinners. We're sinners bound for hell. We're sinners who deserve hell. We're sinners who go to hell without Jesus. God is saying, here's good news for you.

There is redemption. There is life. There's everything that hell is not.

And I've provided it for you in my grace. I have come, he said, to proclaim this good news. And he says in verse 2, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.

Now you notice the contrast there. And again, it's a very deliberate contrast. So easy to miss it if you're reading it over a bit too quickly. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.

[21 : 10] Big difference between a year and a day in length, in duration. But you notice it's a year that's connected with the Lord's favor and it's just a day that's connected with the day of vengeance of the Lord.

That doesn't mean that the vengeance of God is just a tiny little thing that you hardly need to think about. That's not what it's saying. But it is saying this, that the Lord's emphasis is graciousness extending opportunities rather than coming with vengeance to destroy.

That's what it means. He gives a year to his grace. He's got but a day to mention in terms of his vengeance. It's almost as if God is saying, well, I'm actually more concerned to speak about my graciousness and my grace and the favor of the Lord than I am about my vengeance.

And here you are and here I am. And God has preserved us through this time of grace.

God has and here I am and here I am and here I am and here I am and here I am and here I am because he prefers the year of favor to the day of vengeance.

[22 : 39] God has and here I am and here I am and here I am how can people think of the God of the Bible as cruel as a tyrant as somebody who doesn't care when you find that this is his own emphasis that this was Christ's emphasis in his ministry that this is what the servant was anointed for to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and yes the day of vengeance but the overwhelming emphasis for sinners is on the day on the year of favor so that we will see the graciousness of God and use to the maximum the opportunities that God gives us the privileges God gives us in his year of favor of grace.

And then he speaks that's the proclamation and the second thing you find in the ministry of the Lord's anointed servant is transformation because the verses that follow have to do with changing something actually into its opposite and that too is part of what God's salvation is about.

He begins with unrighteousness in you and in me and he changes that into its opposite into righteousness. He begins with sinfulness right through us in every part of us and he changes that to make us holy right through in every part of us ultimately when we will be glorified.

And you notice there are two things especially mentioned in terms of these changes this transformation. He said to give them to actually give them to proclaim liberty to the captives.

We can take that one first of all at the end of verse 1 there. to bring good news. He 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.

[24 : 42] now in Matthew and in the other gospels as well you find an emphasis in Matthew 12 and the equivalent passages and we've seen this many times in looking at gospel passages where Jesus was casting out devils and where his opponents were accusing him of doing that through the power of Satan and you remember how he responded and said if Satan is divided against himself how can his house stand but if I by the spirit of God see what he said by the spirit of God remember he's anointed with the spirit so as to carry out this work of redemption if I by the spirit of God cast out devils then the kingdom of God has come upon you and he went on to speak about giving a picture of what he was doing and binding up the strong man by which he represented

Satan he's gone into Satan's house Satan who had such power and influence over the world till the gospel came and here is Jesus coming into this house of this prince of darkness and first of all he's binding up this strong man and then he plunders the house in other words Jesus releases sinners bound in the captivity of sin and of satanic influence by first of all dealing with Satan himself as Hebrews puts it he came so that by death he might destroy him who had the power over death and that is the devil and then release the captives and that's what you find in that emphasis in the gospels and here is the servant here being anointed by God for that very purpose to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound now that fits in with the year of the

Lord's favor one thing we didn't mention there and it's very appropriate now as we're thinking of releasing prisoners is that in Leviticus chapter 25 it's mentioned elsewhere as well but the practice that God himself specified was that in the 49th into the 50th year it was called the year of jubilee everything many things in God's arrangement many things were done in multiples of seven seven days in the week seven years and then there would be a break for the likes of the ground see there's seven there's six followed by rest seven six years followed by a seventh year of rest even for the ground and then God said you will multiply seven times seven and that will become a year of jubilee and one of the things that happened in the year of jubilee was that slaves had to be set free and you see the slaves that come about in Israel through falling into poverty and falling into hard times if they fell into poverty or debt and they couldn't pay off their debts they could sell themselves as servants to somebody else in the community who would take them and they would become their slave but Israel were forbidden to make that permanent in the year of jubilee they were released they could actually go back to their own lands and to their own homes this is itself a picture for us of redemption the year of the

Lord's favor the year of release the year of jubilee the year of being set free that's why Jesus came that's why the servant was endowed with the spirit that's why the spirit of the Lord God was upon them because he'd come to proclaim liberty to the captives the opening of the prison to those who are bound what is a Christian what is somebody who is saved there are people who have been released from prison from the prison of sin from the meshes of sin from everything in which they ordinarily and by nature and were born into in the sinful condition that's that's that's ours every one of us so God through Christ has come to turn that on its head instead of captivity you have liberty given to the captives and then you have joy given to those 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 spirit of heaviness it's faint spirit there it's a spirit of heaviness or a spirit of despair sorrow and grief are caused by many things but ultimately as the Bible shows and Isaiah also shows chapter 57 for example you can go back look at it later chapter 57 verse 18 he ties very closely sin and grief together and how God deals with sin so as to bring us ultimately beyond grief everything to do with grief is from sin death has come from sin mourning and sorrow connected with death particularly have come from sin as its root and while

[30 : 50] Isaiah here really covers all kinds of sadnesses you have to trace all your sadnesses ultimately back to this root of sin your sin my sin our wrongdoing our rebellion our bentness against God and the servant of God Jesus came to reverse that to undo that and instead of mourning and sorrow and sadness he gives us the joy of gladness the joy of exuberant gladness it's not just something that's like gladness or like joy it's not something for the Christian that goes only so far but not as far as the joy of the world it's actually more than that and one of the great things that you find in this passage is as you see this word instead of repeated throughout all of these verses there to grant to those in mourning to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit the oil of gladness instead of mourning something beautiful about that because what it's saying to us is that there's an exact equivalent between what God gives and what

God takes away he takes away the sadness and he takes away the source but if you like to think of what's left behind of the hole that's left or the vacancy that's left it's not as if joy and gladness comes to fill a little bit of it it actually completely fills it it overcomes it it's to do with the exactness of God's grace and God's provision where he takes sadness away what comes in its place doesn't leave any lack doesn't leave anything wanting it's actually an exact equivalent that satisfies your soul that's why he calls here the headband the beautiful headdress instead of ashes ashes of course were put onto the head in times of mourning it was a sign of grief and a sign of being in turmoil of soul over some loss or other usually death you piled ashes onto your head and what

God is saying is I'm actually reversing that the seventh of God has come to take away grief and to take away mourning by taking away the root of it in sin and instead he's going to give you a beautiful headdress the very opposite of mourning and death from sin because he's giving you the oil of gladness oil to do with life with exuberance of life and you see there's something else there as well which is also very precious not only is that an exact equivalent but what God is saying is where I'm seeing the ashes as representing your grief it's there I'm going to actually touch your life and replace it with the headband of joy God puts his finger on the exact point where you hurt and it's there that he heals and there that he cures and there that he brings relief it's not accidental it's not something that's not been calculated exactly by

God whatever your sadness is tonight whatever is the cause of it whatever the approximate cause of it let alone the ultimate cause of it in its root and sin you can be assured of this that what God has for you in his salvation in his comfort in the joy of gladness is going to be applied exactly as you need it exactly where it hurts exactly where the condition is in every single instance it matches it matches up exactly you could say that these garments of praise that he mentions here instead of the spirit of heaviness well there's no such thing with God as a bad fit sometimes you buy a garment you're given the dimensions to whoever's providing the garment for you or if it's an off the peg thing which it often is you've looked at the dimensions you've looked at well that's my waistline yes it's bigger than it should be but that's what it is that's my measurement if I'm buying a suit

I've got a chest a certain size I'm looking at the jacket and that's exactly what it says and if you're sending for one especially it's even more important to look at these dimensions and yet when it comes it's maybe not what you expect maybe your shape isn't just exactly what this jacket or these trousers have been shaped for so sometimes you'll find yes it says it's a 42 inch chest or whatever waist is but it's a bit loose or it doesn't really hang properly the garments that God gives to us are always an exact fit they're always in accordance with your need the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness it's not a bad fit ever it's always perfect that's why we're thankful that when we're cast down in mind well maybe psychologists psychiatrists can help us especially

[36 : 58] Christian ones we're not decrying the use of them there's only one who really knows our mind that's the one who created it there's only one who really knows our inner turmoil that's the one who took it to himself there's only one who knows how to fit us out with praise and with joy because only he knows how to cut the garment exactly to fit your sorrow to meet your need to be exactly what you need even if it's not always what you want that's God that's God through the servant endowed to that end so when you come to Jesus when you give your life to Jesus when Christ himself becomes your savior you know he's going to deal with you exactly as you need and no one else can do that for you you can't do it yourself no minister can do it for you the whole church can't do it for you the highest angel in heaven can't do it for you but he can he's been endowed with his spirit to enable him to do it to give you the replacement for all your sorrows ultimately and that of course is why the bible finishes as it does and we can conclude with that in chapter 21 of revelation where you find this account of the new

Jerusalem the final state of God's people in glory and in verses 3 to 4 of chapter 21 this is what you read I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as that God you see that's ultimately the terminus of what we saw this morning heaven reopened for us for our entrance this is the end this is the terminus this is the finishing point it's glory in heaven it's the new Jerusalem it's being with God and God being with his people beyond the resurrection beyond the judgment beyond everything it's now in its final state behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away and he who was seated on the throne said behold

I am making all things new that's the word new new life new creation new experience new state new relationship with God how's it all come about to come about through the anointed servant of God who was endowed so that we might come to be endowed by him let's pray Lord our God we thank you for all that you do in the lives of your people in addition to all that you have done as the basis for it we thank you for all that we anticipate that you will yet do as you will bring your people to their final state we thank you for the gospel that tells us these things we give thanks for the way in which it gives us such a great note of hope and joy and triumph for the way in which we are able to use it against the darkness of sin and of death and of this present world we pray

Lord that you bless this to each of us this evening and for any Lord who may be here and are still not new creations and still do not have you as their Lord as their Redeemer we pray that you would grant to them as they further contemplate this great vision and this great this great description that you have given of yourself Lord help them we pray to embrace you and help them to know the benefits of coming under the sovereign mastery of the Lord of glory himself here as we pray for your glory's sake Amen All right