

Isaiah 61 The Year of the Lord's Favor

What a beautiful passage we have this morning, especially as we take the Lord's Supper together! I get the title from v. 2 as Isaiah speaks of a PERSON who will bring the favor of God upon his people. Today, the Jews take this passage and say these words only refer to Isaiah the prophet. After all, the "Spirit of God" was upon Isaiah in a special way. And, his message was one of "good news" to the "poor," the "broken-hearted," particularly with a view to those in exile (both in Assyria and Babylon). If we view this passage ONLY from this perspective, I get it. These words could be applied to any true prophet of God in the OT.

However, I see at least 2 main reasons to see ultimate fulfillment in someone much greater than Isaiah. First Reason: The Year of the Lord's Favor has never been experienced (with Israel) in the ways Isaiah describes. There is strong evidence Isaiah is using "The Year of Jubilee" as a picture of a time to come that goes way beyond what Israel will experience when the exiles return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Just curious, have you heard of "The Year of Jubilee" as described in Leviticus 25. Let me explain. It was actually commanded by God in the Law of Moses. And, it should have taken place every 50 years in Israel. "Jubilee" comes from the word "Jubal" which means "music." On the Day of Atonement, they were to blow the trumpet signaling a special year-long festival in the life of Israel. In this year, there was no planting of crops. All land was to be returned to its original owner. All slaves were set free. All debts were cancelled. Can you imagine? As I studied, I see no evidence that this year was ever kept.

Second Reason: Jesus says of Himself that HE, and HIS work as the Messiah, IS the fulfillment of this prophecy.

This passage has its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. For we know at the beginning of his ministry, He quotes these verses from Isaiah directly as referring to Him (Luke 4:16:30). Therefore, Jesus interprets Isaiah! With these things in mind, I have 4 truths about the Year of the Lord's Favor: 1) Messenger, 2) Mission, 3) Recipients, 4) Results.

1. Messenger. Jesus is the PERSON sent by God to usher in the Year of the Lord's Favor. He is the One who institutes the Year of Jubilee. He is the One who announces it! He is the One who brings it to pass! How do we know this?

First, we know this because it is obvious in the Book of Isaiah (and all the other OT prophets). He often speaks of a "Davidic" king who will come one day. Is. 9:6:-7: **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."** Is. 11:1-2: **"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD . . ."** And then in 11:10: **"In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."** In 16:5: **"then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and**

seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.” Finally, in 32:1: **“Behold, a king will reign in righteousness . . .”**

Also, Isaiah speaks of a SERVANT who will come one day, one who will serve particularly through suffering, as he bears the sins of God’s people, not only in Israel, but also in the whole world. There are lots of verses (cf. 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). I think particularly of 52:13-53:12 which begins: **“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.”** Is. 53:11: sums up the work of this servant: **“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”** Mark, in the NT, tells us clearly the words of Jesus who says, **“I came not to be served, but serve and give myself a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45).

Also, Isaiah speaks of an anointed ONE who will come one day and make things right. And He is the ONE who will usher in the Year of the Lord’s Favor. Is. 59:21: **“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth . . . from this time forth and forevermore.”** Is. 61:10: **“. . . for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness . . .”** In Is. 62:10, he says to this ONE: **“Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway; clear it of stones; lift up a signal over the peoples. Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”** (Other titles given to the coming Messiah are “Lord, Redeemer, Savior, etc.)

The second and most obvious reason we know Jesus is the Messenger is because Jesus Himself says He is the ONE! Luke tells us the story. After Jesus’ baptism and temptations in the desert, He immediately entered his public ministry. He entered the synagogue in Nazareth. And the men gave him the opportunity to speak. He immediately opened the Scroll of Isaiah. And He reads these words: **“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 favor.”** And all eyes are upon him as they wait for his comments. And He says, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”** (Luke 4:16-21). There can be no greater statement of Jesus’ interpretation of Isaiah. He is the Davidic King! He is the Servant! He is the anointed ONE! He is the messenger! And only through him will come the favor of God! This is the ONE we remember as we take the Lord’s Supper.

2. Mission. The mission of the messenger is the preaching of the Gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God. Or, we might say, *“the ONE who preaches salvation in the Year of the Lord’s Favor.”* Look at 61:1: **“to bring good news.”** Then again in v. 2: **“to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor . . .”** It is also true of the Messiah that He not only proclaims salvation, but also is the ONE who does the saving. Look at v. 10: **“For he has clothed me with garments of salvation . . .”** Now, it interesting that when Jesus spoke these words of Isaiah in the synagogue, he stopped with “the year of the Lord’s favor.” He does not continue with what follows. Look at v. 2: **“and the day of vengeance of our God.”** For we know that vengeance and righteous judgment are also the work of the Messiah. And a day of judgment is coming! However, this

“day of vengeance” is still to come. We await his 2nd coming. And we know He will finish his mission. But for now, as the Son of God took on flesh, his mission is salvation. Do you remember Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3? In 16-17 we read: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be SAVED through him.”**

In 45:22, Isaiah says, **“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”** And in 52:10 he says, **“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”** Today as we remember our Lord, we remember him as our savior. **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** (Acts 4:12). **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”**(Let’s move on.

3. Recipients. Who are the recipients of the messenger and the message of the Year of the Lord’s Favor? To put it another way, who are the recipients of salvation? I believe it is those who, in humility, recognize their plight, and listen by faith to the messenger, and by his power they are changed. Look how Isaiah describes these people. V. 1: **“to bring good news to the poor”** (afflicted is probably the best translation). Also v. 1: **“He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.”** And, **“to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”** V. 2b: **“to comfort those who mourn.”** In the immediate context, Isaiah looks forward to Babylonian captivity to a people who are afflicted. They are poor physically because their lands and their houses no longer belong to them. They are broken-hearted because of their captivity. They are no longer the masters, but the slaves. They are not loner the lenders, but the borrowers. And, they mourn over their state!

Also, consider the Year of Jubilee. Over a 50-year period, bad things happen to people. There is sickness leading to doctor bills that cannot be paid and they go into debt. They make a bad business decision and they borrow money, becoming a slave to the lender. Famine comes and crops die, making it impossible to pay the bills. In these situations people become poor, afflicted, broken-hearted, put into prison. They are bound and they mourn. Then, God gives the most beautiful YEAR OF FAVOR when all land is returned. Slaves are given their freedom. Debts are forgiven. The Land rests. And all the people are jubilant!

Brothers and sisters, whether it is captivity or the effects of sinful life upon sinful men and women, IN CHRIST, the Year of the Lord’s Favor has begun. And his message is one of repentance and faith in Him. **“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). And the recipients of this messenger and this message are those who KNOW they are in prison. They KNOW they are captive. You might say, *“I’m not captive. I’m not in prison.”* But you are! **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23). Outside of Christ, your sins have separated you from God (Is. 59:2). You are slave to sin (John 8:34).

A VERY important truth for us is this: Jesus came to save sinners. Which ones? Those who know they are sinners. This is why they mourn. Jesus said, “**For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners**” (Matt. 9:13). “**Those who are well have no need of a physician . . .**” (Mark 2:17). In Jesus’ most famous sermon he begins by saying, “**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied**” (Matt. 5:4-6). There came a time in my “religious” life that I realized this truth. And it was ONLY after this understanding that penetrated my heart that the Year of the Lord’s Favor began. And so it is with you as well.

4. Results. Vv. 3-9 are some of the most beautiful in the Bible. Let me read through them and make some comments.

“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. 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. Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; 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; 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 the LORD has blessed.” Brothers and sisters, these are the blessings of the Lord’s Favor!

Truths:

The Year of the Lord’s favor is bound up with the atonement. In the OT, the year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement. In the same way, favor with God comes through the cross! There can be no favor without atonement.

Today is the day of salvation. Paul builds on this truth from Isaiah in 2 Cor. 6:2: “**For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.**” Now is the Year of the Lord’s Favor! And we celebrate this in the Lord’s Supper “till He comes.” The next event on God’s timetable will be The Day of Vengeance. May this stir our hearts as we look unto Christ again and again and again, “till He comes.”

Gospel proclamation is announcing the year of the Lord’s favor. And this task is given to us! In Rom. 10:14-15, Paul says: “**How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”**”

There is still an: “Already, but not yet” aspect to the Year of the Lord’s Favor. Already, the Year of the Lord’s Favor has begun. “Today is the day of salvation.” However, this “favor” cannot come in its fulness until all the enemies of God are removed. This is the 2nd part of v. 2: “**the day of vengeance of our God . . .**” Therefore, do not see these verses as ONLY coming at Jesus 2nd coming. Already, we have salvation and the results the beautiful truths from Isaiah 61 are already ours. But, we still wait. This is why we take the Lord’s Supper, “till He comes.”