

01.10.10 / Isaiah 61:1-3**Passage Insight**

Consider if you can for a moment what a revolutionary statement is this: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me . . .” When this prophecy was uttered, imagine the weight of those words. That the very Spirit of God would be with someone is staggering news indeed and should draw our immediate attention. This “someone” is God in human form, Immanuel, God With Us, the Messiah, the Anointed One who brings renewal to all things.

This is truly one of the most revolutionary passages of the Bible, and one that sets the name of Jesus apart from all other names, as Jesus quotes word for word this very passage and attributes it to Himself in Luke 4:14-21:

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 synagogues, being glorified by all.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, 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 favor.”

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 on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

To attribute this prophecy from Isaiah 61 to oneself would have required either the most extraordinary excess of arrogance ever displayed or the calm assurance that comes from One who knows who He truly is and is sure of His purpose and His source. When Jesus attributes this prophecy to Himself, He drops the gauntlet; either He will be shown to be the biggest fool in history or the very name of Jesus will be placed above all other names because His words are seen to be true. Clearly, as Scripture and the passage of time reveal, we see the latter. As we examine how Jesus does what is promised, let's first look at what is being referenced in this passage.

The expression “proclaim liberty” found in verse 1 employs the same Hebrew words as the command in Leviticus 25:10 where the Year of Jubilee is being proclaimed: “And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.” This Year of Jubilee was an extraordinary concept whereby God required the forgiveness of all debts, freedom for bondservants (those who had sold themselves into slavery), and also allowed for homecoming for those who had been estranged from their homelands. Only God Himself could initiate this Year of Jubilee, and it was on His terms and His timing. Only God Himself had the power to command a release of this magnitude for His people. In His reference to the prophecy, Jesus is claiming to have this same power, claiming to be sent on this same errand on an even grander scale, claiming that the anointing of God's Spirit has led Him to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, where God the Father will use us as He sees fit for His glory and His glory alone if we will accept this liberty.

Isaiah 61 then shows us in verses 2-3 what Jesus will do for His people. We are presented with a series of opposites. Jesus will:

- Bring good news to those who know only bad news
- Bandage the wounded
- Bring freedom to those in captivity
- Proclaim the times of favor (for those who are with God) and vengeance (for those who are against Him)
- Comfort those who need comfort
- Adorn His people with party attire rather than mourning attire

In short, Jesus changes everything. He renews everything. He reconciles the broken to Himself and brings us home. Jesus announces His capacity to bring “good news.” He does what no one else could do, and in doing so, proves that not only is He the deliverer of the good news. . . He is the very good news Itself. We see this clearly in Isaiah 53:4-5:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him
stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our
iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are
healed.

The Spirit of God anoints Jesus and compels Him to bring the good news to us. We see throughout Scripture that Jesus is one with this Spirit across all time and space. Wonder of wonders. . . when we follow Jesus, we are given this same Spirit to live inside of us. Hear this. Followers of Jesus have God living inside of them. This is how we are enabled to do the work of Christ on Earth until His return. God’s own Spirit guides us, prays on our behalf, teaches us, convicts us, and literally changes us that we may be called “oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord. . .” What is the character and nature of an oak? Strong, upright, unbending in trial. To what end and for what purpose are we transformed into these oaks of righteousness? That we bear fruit and thus glorify the Lord our God. We see this clearly at end of the passage in Isaiah 61:3b: “. . . that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.” And again in John 15:8: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

Application Questions (feel free to use the ones that best meet the needs of your group – you might even consider breaking up into groups of 2 or 3 and letting people explore some of these questions together and report back to the larger group)

Captivity

- 1) Where do you find yourself in captivity to sin these days / this week?
- 2) What needs to happen for you to recognize that Jesus can free you?

Comfort

- 1) Where is your heart in turmoil and upset, in need of comfort?
- 2) What are some of the ways you have historically sought comfort?
- 3) What would it take for you to seek comfort in Christ alone? What would you need to hear? What would you need to believe?

Year of Jubilee

- 1) If we are living in the Year of Jubilee on Earth until Christ's return, where does your life fail to mirror this?
- 2) What are the obstacles that are keeping you from living in release and grace?
- 3) How will you remove these obstacles?
- 4) When will you do this?

Righteousness

- 1) What are the characteristics of an "oak of righteousness, the planting of the Lord...?"
- 2) Which of these characteristics describes you best?
- 3) Which characteristics do not describe you?
- 4) What are you exhibiting in their place?
- 5) What would it take to exchange these characteristics?
- 6) How would the lives of those around you look differently if YOU were to change?

Bearing Fruit / Glorification of the Lord

- 1) What is one area of your life where you seek your own glory before that of the Lord?
- 2) What fruit are you bearing for the kingdom of God?
- 3) Where are you knowingly bearing fruit for yourself rather than using God's gifts to bear fruit for His kingdom?
- 4) How would your life look different if you sought God's glory in all that you do?
- 5) What do you need to let go of in order for this to happen?
- 6) What fruit might God use you to bear if you did this?
- 7) When will you make this change?
- 8) Who will hold you accountable?

Sources

- Be Comforted
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- The Bible Reader's Companion
- A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments
- New International Commentary on the Old Testament