

Beauty for Ashes — 12/31/23

TEXT- Isaiah 61:1-3 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.*

Genesis 50:20 *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

INTRO - This is a prophecy about the coming Messiah to bring healing to the nations.

I. THE PREACHING OF GOOD TIDINGS. *Christ "came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved"* (John 3:17). The angels who announced his birth announced that it was a subject for joy and rejoicing—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

His forerunner declared it to be the object of his coming, "that all flesh should see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). From a very early date his message to man was known as the gospel, *i.e.* "the good tidings." What could be better tidings than the announcement of free pardon on repentance, of salvation, of atonement, of deliverance from sin, of a Comforter to support, and sustain, and cleanse the heart, and give men peace and joy in believing?

II. THE HEALING OF THE BROKEN-HEARTED. "the broken-hearted" seem to be meant, those who are deeply grieved from their sins. He "*healed the broken in heart, and bound up their wounds*" (**Psa 147:3**). He made atonement for their sins, and thus secured them forgiveness; he assured them of God's mercy and readiness to pardon; he bade them "come to him," and promised to "give them rest" (**Mat 11:28**).

III. THE GIVING OF LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES. "The captives" are the servants of sin—the unfortunates whom Satan has made his prisoners, and compels to labour in his service. Christ came to "proclaim" to them "liberty." "Christ Jesus," St. Paul tells us, "came into the world to save sinners" (**1Ti 1:15**). He himself declared, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (**Mat 9:13**). It is one of his greatest glories that he delivers men "from the bondage of

corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (**Rom 8:21**). All the bonds of sin may be struck off; the service of Satan may be renounced and quitted; and the captives have only thenceforth to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free" (**Gal 5:1**).

IV. THE GIVING OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND. Our Lord, when-on earth, gave recovery of sight, in the most literal sense, to several persons who were literally blind. But this is scarcely the "giving of sight" which was one of the main purposes of his coming. He came to open the eyes of men's understandings, to give them spiritual intelligence and spiritual insight, to enable them to discern between right and wrong, between good and evil. Men at the time were so far gone from original righteousness, that they were to a large extent blind to moral distinctions— **Isaiah 5:20** *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* *were "vain in their imaginations, and had "their foolish hearts darkened* **Rom 1:21**. Christ dispelled this spiritual darkness.

V. THE PROCLAIMING OF A TIME OF ACCEPTANCE. Christ proclaimed a "time of acceptance" in various ways. To the Jews generally the three years of his ministry formed "*the acceptable time,*" during which, if they had received him (**John 1:11**), they would have maintained their position as a nation, and have held pre-eminence in the Church of Christ. To individuals who heard him the "time of acceptance" was that between such hearing and a hardening of the heart consequent on the rejection of his gracious message. Christians generally, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

VI. THE PROCLAIMING OF A DAY OF VENGEANCE. It was among the purposes of our Lord's coming that he should "proclaim a day of vengeance."

1. To the nation of the Jews, which by rejecting him caused its own rejection from the position assigned it under the first covenant, and was delivered up for punishment to the Romans. This he did by a number of remarkable prophecies (*e.g.* the following: which announced that Jerusalem was to be destroyed, and that there was to be "great wrath upon the people"

2. The general day of vengeance upon God's enemies is that "last day," which our Lord announced so often, when he "*will come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead.*" *Then all his enemies will be "put under his feet."* *Then will be fulfilled the apocalyptic vision, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book*

was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:12-15).

VII. THE COMFORTING OF MOURNERS.

It was indicative of the tenderness of Jesus, that he had great compassion. In his sermon on the mount he assigned to them the second Beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Mat 5:4). Thrice only in his ministry does he seem to have come across actual death, and then each time he had such pity on those who mourned their dead, that he worked miracles on their behalf, and comforted them by raising their lost ones to life again (Mar 5:22-42; Luk 7:12-15; Joh 11:32-44). After his resurrection, he hastened to comfort the women who mourned him, Through him it is that Christians "sorrow not as they that have no hope" (1Th 4:13); Through Him they look to receive their dead again raised to life Heb 11:35

VIII. THE CROWNING OF THE SAINTS

"Henceforth," said St. Paul, as he approached the end of his life, "there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing" (2Ti 4:8).

We shall receive, says St. James, "the crown of life" (Jas 1:12). "When the chief Shepherd shall appear," says St. Peter, "ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1Pe 5:4). Such crowns were seen by the beloved disciple as worn by the elders in the heavenly region (Rev 4:4), and were promised to all who should remain "faithful unto death" (Rev 2:10) by him that is "Faithful and True" (Rev 19:11). A part of the intention of Christ's mission was to purify to himself a people to whom such crowns might without unfitness be awarded in his heavenly kingdom. The term "crown" is, no doubt, a metaphor; but it signifies some definite and positive degree of glory, having a substantial value, and forming a proper object of the Christian's desire.

IX. THE ANOINTING THEM WITH THE OIL OF JOY.

Christ himself was to be "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows" (Psa 45:7).

His mission on earth was, in part, to extend the blessing of this anointing to

his disciples. The "oil of gladness," to symbolize the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is called by John an "unction from the Holy One" 1 Jn 2:20 and which was, in fact, the unction wherewith Christ himself was anointed. To give the Holy Spirit to Christians was a very main object of his coming. The Spirit was essential to the sanctification of Christians; and he must "send the Spirit," and he could not send him until he himself was first "glorified. Luke tells us how soon after his ascension the Spirit was given Acts 2:4-33 and our Lord promised that, after he once came, he would abide with the Church "for ever" John 14:16. Of all the immediate consequences of our Lord's mission the gift of the Spirit was perhaps the most precious, embracing as it did regeneration, sanctification, comfort, strength, gladness.

CONCL — The good tidings were preached, and the brokenhearted healed, and the captives set free, and the dull of sight given moral discernment, and the acceptable time proclaimed, and the day of vengeance threatened, and the mourners comforted, and the crowns of glory promised, and the Holy Spirit given, in order that "oaks of righteousness" might be planted in the garden of the Lord—that men might burst the bonds of sin, and become righteous, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" Tit 2:14