

# The Acceptable Year of the Lord

*Book of Isaiah*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 61:1-3

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I'd like to invite you to look with me in Isaiah 61 once again, and coming back to the same three verses that we looked at last time, but slowly moving forward in this particular portion of Scripture. It is so rich, so full, that I don't like to move too quickly and as the Lord has directed, we come back to this portion once again this time and probably again next time, so deep is this well of water here.

But let's begin with verse 1 of Isaiah 61,

1 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.

I want us to consider primarily in verse 2 what the Lord himself was sent to proclaim because that's who is proclaiming here. When verse 1 said, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me," it's not a reference to Isaiah himself, although no man could preach the Gospel of Christ, exalt Christ, apart from the Spirit, but here specifically is forward looking to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ would come to this earth. And as he went about preaching as the anointed of the Lord, we looked at that last time, the word "anointed" is the word "Christ." That's where we get our word "Messiah" from. "Messiah" means "the anointed one."

Certainly this is what he did. He preached good tidings unto the meek. The Gospel is good news. The world considers the meek to be weak, but I trust that this room is full of meek ones today; ones who have been made so; humbled by the Spirit of God to see yourself as a sinner and to know nothing good in yourself. There is good news for those who have been so taught of the Lord, that there is nothing good in me. We say it but it takes the Lord to reveal it and to show us, and when he does, I tell you, that's a mercy.

That's a mercy that the Lord would not let you go on thinking more highly of yourself or myself than we ought to think.

Then, "he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." I've often said the Lord never breaks a heart but what he purposes to heal it. He's the Great Physician. So even there, don't chafe when the Lord breaks your heart and removes every self-confidence, because even that is a mercy. That's the Great Physician doing it. You've heard of doctors coming in and someone has broken a limb and they've just let it reheel and the doctor looks at it and says, "We can't let it go this way. We're going to have to break it again and set it right." That's the work of the Spirit to do, to break these otherwise hardened hearts that if left in that state would never know what true grace and mercy is and such was the work of the Lord.

Then it says, "to proclaim liberty to the captives." That word refers to what we were in Adam, captives. What we were under the law of God until Christ paid the debt, finished the work. He led captivity captive is what the Scriptures say and that's what he did to proclaim liberty to those who were under the law. "In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made unto the law, to redeem them that are under the law." So if you've come today as a needy sinner, that's a good thing. There is good news, good tidings for such. Christ himself said that he did not come into this world to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and such is our need.

And it says, "the opening of the prison to them that are bound." I think of Barabbas as he sat in that prison thinking that it was he, himself, that would soon be hanging on that cross and even perhaps hearing the crowds crying, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" as a mob crowd would and him thinking, "They're calling for me," and then to find out that they didn't come to get him to crucify him but to turn him loose. You say, "Turn him loose? A thief, a robber, didn't he deserve death?" Well, don't we all deserve death and yet Christ was put in his place. What good news. That's what this is, the opening of the prison to them that are bound. That's what the Lord did through his death.

Then to come to verse 2 here where he declares, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Now, words are important and we know that every word of Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, and this word "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" has a lot of history behind it. To a Jew reading this particular Scripture, they would have to think back to the Old Testament law and the year of the Jubilee where every 50<sup>th</sup> year, it didn't matter what kind of debts you had racked up, it didn't matter how far in debt you were, every 50<sup>th</sup> year everything was reset. Put back to zero. Everything given back to the original owner and everything went forward from there. That was the law and that was called the acceptable year of the Lord.

So you can see in this context of proclaiming liberty to captives and to the opening of the prison to them that are bound, how this has significance. Actually, the word "acceptable" here, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," means "with acceptance." Is it acceptable to proclaim liberty to the captives? Well, I can see some with folded arms

thinking, "Hm, that's not fair. They got themselves in trouble, so why should they be set free?" People have that attitude. I'll tell you one thing, the captives didn't have that attitude.

When it says here, "the opening of the prison to them that are bound," maybe there were some standing there waiting and thinking, "They shouldn't be let go." But the ones who were let go understood something of mercy, that even though they deserved to be captives and remain there, yet they were set free. And some might argue, "Well, that's not just." I will tell you that if you will search into the records of Scripture you'll find that everything that God declares is just and it is right, whether you see it that way or not. That's why I think it's important to understand that in this word "acceptable" is the word "with acceptance." It is with the approval of the highest Judge of all who has declared it, and when you understand that this is satisfactory to the highest Judge of all, who are we to declare otherwise?

That's the sense here. We saw this word already over in Isaiah 60:7 where it says, "All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee," and notice, "they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar." That's the word, same word in the original as over here "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." So in other words, with the approval of God himself.

When it speaks here of the flocks gathering together, the rams, in other words, this is what God ordained to be the way of worship through the sacrifice of animals, ones that were without blemish upon his altar until such time as the Lord Jesus Christ should come and fulfill it in his sacrifice. But with acceptance. There is in Scripture an acceptable time of which God ordained an acceptable sacrifice, and there is an acceptable state of being because God has accepted those for whom that sacrifice has been made.

You say, "What is the acceptable time when it says here, 'to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD?'" We're not left guessing as to the fulfillment of this. This wasn't just something that was to be fulfilled in Israel, bringing them back from captivity and all being well. No, it all looked forward to a time in which the Lord Jesus Christ himself would come and would pay the sin debt for his people, because even under the Old Testament law, in the year of the Jubilee when everybody went free and all debts were paid, it was with sacrifices. It wasn't just "olly, olly, in free." There were sacrifices that were offered in that year. That was the Day of the Atonement when the high priest himself, once a year, would go into the Holiest of Holies and on behalf of the people of Israel, that blood was sprinkled upon the mercy seat.

So that's how God is just to justify. It's not just him looking the other way with regard to sin, but where a sin debt has been paid, there remains therefore no condemnation. Christ having so completely fulfilled the righteousness and holiness of his Father, upon completion of his work, there remained nothing but righteousness to impute. That's what's described here in this one verse, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

You say, "How do you know that?" Look at Luke 2, and we looked at this last time but we've come back to it when the angels declared, notice in verse 11, "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," and in verse 14 the angels declared, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." That could also be translated "God's will towards men." And peace, you say, "On what basis?" Well, verse 11, "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." "Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sin."

People take this today just as a touchy-feely, feel good, "Peace, brother," and good will. Everybody feels in the spirit, but that's not the connection. Them declaring, "Glory to God in the highest," means that in this Savior is one who, through his life, obedient life and by his death, procures peace on earth. It's not enough that it was purposed in eternity and decreed, this is a salvation that had to be worked out on earth among men. "A body though hast prepared for me." You can see to what extent God went to fulfill righteousness that it actually be worked out in a man for men, for sinners, and in that, good will towards men. It's not just good will towards anybody but good will towards those for whom he is the Savior and for whom he is Christ the Lord. That's "the acceptable year of the LORD." That's what Christ came to proclaim.

Now, when you scoot over to Luke 4, you can see how our Lord applied this to himself because in Luke 4, and this is what we saw last time, it says, verse 14, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written," and then here is where we're reading right now, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," and notice, "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." I don't know how you could get a clearer interpretation or understanding of what Isaiah 61 is all about when it says "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," because Christ himself said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." So we don't need to look further than that and to see that he is that anointed one who was to come.

And when it says, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," we understand Christ's ministry spanned many years but it's speaking specifically of that year and I don't know if you think about this but in everything that Christ did, he fulfilled somehow one of those Old Testament laws and feasts. Every detail has been accomplished in him. That was the year of the Jubilee and I've not literally gone back to look at it, but I would venture to say that if you counted the Jewish calendar from the beginning when the Lord gave this commandment up to Christ's death, you would find that it would fall exactly on the year of Jubilee just like his death was on the eve of the Passover, Christ our Passover is slain.

You say, "Have you done it?" No, but I have that much confidence in what this word says that you'll not find it different. I'm not one to try to prove the Scriptures wrong. I'm just believing that when it says here, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," that was a year of Jewish Jubilee, but fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that's what this means, "the acceptable year of the LORD," the year of God's acceptance. Up til the time of Christ coming, there was the offering of the blood of bulls and goats but they couldn't satisfy a holy God for sin, but this was to be the year of God's acceptance. This was the message that was given to John the Baptist and he had but one message, "Behold the Lamb." That should have announced something to the people of his generation. That lamb that was foretold in the Old Testament, "Behold the Lamb. He must increase, I must decrease."

But we see it specifically in Galatians 4:4. Look there with me. Galatians 4. This was the time of God's acceptance. This was the time that all of those sacrifices looked forward to. This was the time of the fulfillment of all that was written, "the acceptable year of the LORD." Here in Galatians 4, again, you can see in verse 1, "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

So there was an acceptable sacrifice which is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, an acceptable time, a time accepted of God. Here it says simply, "in the fullness," notice, "of the time," right down to the minute, right down to the second. Not one second before, not one second after, God sent forth his Son. Then there is that accepted state which is the result of it. Look over in Ephesians 1, just one book forward. You remember, I showed you in Isaiah 60 how the Lord used this same word to speak of those animals that were to be offered, coming up with acceptance on his altar. God accepted those sacrifices over all those generations as a covering. That's what the word "atonement" means, it's a covering. But for God to be satisfied, there had to be more than just a covering, more than just put out of his sight, it had to be put away. Here's where we have the proof. So complete was the work of the Lord Jesus Christ that he looks, because of this acceptable year of the Lord, he looks upon those for whom Christ came and paid the debt, those sinners, not just as acceptable unto him but as it says here, accepted. I love that. Do you see that in verse 6? "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted," how? "In the beloved." And how was it done? "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

So not only has the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for his people forgiven their sins, but put them in a state of acceptance with God. Do you know the thing that is most comforting to me as a sinner is to know that nothing changes that state before him. If I've been accepted in the Beloved, my sin does not make me any less accepted, but neither does my supposed righteousness make me any more accepted. I'm either accepted or I'm not. I can rest with that because this heart will throw sin up in your face and say, "Ah-ha,

see? How can you call yourself a Christian?" And if that trips you up and you ever get your eyes off of Christ, there is no darker hole than that to fall into, than to be weighed down with the thought of your sin and your eyes off of Christ. But at the same time, if your eyes ever get off of him to where you start thinking somehow you're righteousness has moved you a little bit further down the road or your goodness, you're feeling a little more like some people who say, "I'm feeling a little more sanctified today." Well, that's a bad position to be in right there. As one old writer said, "If at any time you feel yourself in your experience to be somewhat closer to God because of that, it's at that moment that you're actually the furthest from him because you're not looking to Christ, you're looking to what's in here." It's like the hymn writer said,

"We dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand,  
All other ground," whether despair or thoughts of self-righteousness, "is sinking sand."

But that's "the acceptable year of the LORD."

Now, coming back here to Isaiah 61, we've seen the meaning of the acceptable year, but what is its fulfillment? How does it relate to the Old Testament law? I love to preach a message that shows a satisfaction of God's law and justice and righteousness. If I know that I'm a condemned sinner and someone comes up to me and says, "Oh, don't worry about it." That's no consolation. "I'm telling you, you can be at peace. Don't worry." I need something legal. I need something that is from the Judge himself that shows that the Judge is satisfied. That the Judge has accepted me as being righteous.

And here in these Scriptures, we find that everything pertaining to Christ is related to that law. It was one of the things that used to, as the Lord taught me the Gospel and I was overseas preaching the Gospel, that would weigh me down because of the thought of a lot of these mission societies was that they really don't need the Old Testament to be translated. That will just confused them, so let's just translate portions of the New Testament. And I can't tell you my frustration in staying to preach sometime where all people had was just the New Testament and some mission society felt like their work was done because they had translated the New Testament and I found myself having to go back and explain. How do you preach any portion of the New Testament without referring back to the Old Testament?

But it was like a lost book to them. They were saying, "Where are you getting these stories?" They didn't have them. That's not how God has given us his word. He has given it as a whole and those that translated even this word that we hold in our hand, the King James translators that took years to sit down and to do it with great care, I'm thankful that they didn't just determine all we needed was the New Testament because this is founded upon a very clear instruction that God gave to the people of Israel when it says, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," that being the year of Jubilee, that being a time when the trumpet was blown. When it says, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," when that year of Jubilee was announced, it was announced with the blowing of

the trumpet. It was announced with sacrifices being offered. It was a proclamation throughout the whole land that any that were slaves in Israel were to be set free. It was a time of the remission of debts. It was a time of the restoration of possessions back to their original families. When I think about even the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he didn't just put us back into our original standing in Adam. I'm thankful that wasn't it. He put us all the way back into that original standing of our true Father in heaven, the just God. He gave us a righteousness that can never be taken away, such was his work of fulfillment.

But look with me in Leviticus 25. Here's the link with Isaiah 61:2. Leviticus 25. Bob, I thought about having you read this portion but there are like 55 verses. That's a lot to read and I appreciate what you read for us in Romans 6 because it relates of being made, set free, through the righteousness of Christ. But here in Leviticus 25, notice in verse 8, "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month," now notice this, "in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land." Remember, I said this wasn't just an "olly, olly in free." There was a proclaiming, the sounding of the trumpet. And, again, even there, a picture of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ because those trumpets were rams' horns. How did they get a ram's horn except by a sacrifice?

So everything about the declaration of this 50<sup>th</sup> year and debts being remitted was based on a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in his death. In the Day of Atonement, that one great day that was set aside where the high priest once a year would go in with the blood of bulls and goats and would sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, that's why there was a joyous proclamation. It wasn't just turning people loose but a just payment.

"The trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and," notice, "proclaim liberty throughout all the land." Isn't that what Isaiah 61 says? "Proclaim liberty to the captives."

"And proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed." That's a whole year off of work. Who is going to complain about that? Not only debts remitted, but don't you dare even go out there and plant. Oh, too bad. What is it a picture of? Rest. That's a rest, but it was a picture. Every 50<sup>th</sup> year, the Lord put it in the Jewish calendar, forward looking to the rest that the Lord Jesus Christ gives to those that he has set free by his blood and righteousness. I can rest there.

It says, "For it is the jubile," jubilation. That's where we get the word "jubilation" from. Jubilation. I've often said there is no jubilation in subjecting myself to a message that tells me every time I come and sit down and open this word, what I've got to do, what I've got to be, I should be thinking, I should be acting. Boy, you can go out tired. I remember visiting a preacher in one of our schools in Africa and he was from Madagascar. I went

over there one time and he invited me over, and I was in for a surprise when we got there. He was all dressed up, funny looking, long white robe with all this stuff on. When we went in, he has these candles burning behind. I didn't realize what I was getting into. This guy had been studying some of our studies that I had put together, but that's why I went around to visit. I wanted to see how they were applying it and obviously he hadn't learned a thing.

But he wanted me to preach to his congregation so I waded through all this stuff. There was about 45 minutes of ceremony, an hour, and he had them all worn out by the time I got up there and most people were expecting me just to get up and do a little reading and sit down. Well, I had a 40 minute message prepared, 45, and not only that, but it wasn't something they were used to hearing because they were shuffling, they were up and down, they were talking in the back, they were going in and out. People were frustrated. I thought there was a riot brewing and when we finally finished and locked up and on our way back to his house, he told me, he said, "I'll tell you what, I am tired." I said, "You ought to be. All that gymnastics and gyrations and up and down and the stuff you were doing has nothing to do with bringing these people." I said, "They walked in for miles and they came to hear one message that they needed to hear and that was a message of proclamation of liberty to captives and peace based upon a just sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and all you're doing is wearing them out. You ought to be ashamed." I told him that, "You ought to be ashamed." I don't know if the Lord ever, ever taught him. I never heard so. When I left there, I never had anymore contact with him.

But that's what people do, preachers, works religion. It's like in the time of Pharaoh with the children of Israel. It got to where they were populating and producing and their numbers were growing and so Pharaoh got to thinking, "They've got too much time on their hands. If they're having kids, they've got too much time on their hands." So initially he was gathering the straw to help make the bricks and what he did was take the straw away and made them gather that and the clay that they needed and still make the same number of bricks everyday. That's what works religion does. If they think you're enjoying yourself too much, under a Gospel message of rest, they're going to try to make you feel guilty.

But I'm telling you, this acceptable year of the Lord, verse 12, "For it is the jubile." There should be a jubilation which in that word is the word "elation." When Christ said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," don't you dare feel guilty about resting in a Savior and in a sacrifice that God himself has accepted. This is the acceptable year of the Lord and he tells us to rest and so that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to hang a "Do not disturb" sign on my door and let the legalists run by, let them knock, I'm not answering. "Be quiet. I'm resting." Because there are those that will come in to spy out your liberty and wonder how it is that you can be so happy and doing so little. Well, do you know what? That's what I do when I rest. I'm happy in doing nothing, just resting in what the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished. Now, you can't just take that and apply it yourself. You will have no rest as long as your heart is still bound up in legalism and lost. This is the same Spirit that was upon Christ that declares liberty to the captives, reveals Christ in that heart and therein they rest and such is our jubilation.

It says here in verse 12, "it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field." This is in a year you're not even working but you benefit from the increase. "In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession."

So, as I said, there's clearly here a prophetic proclamation in Isaiah 61 regarding the time of Christ and him being the fulfillment of the year of Jubilee, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." All of those Passovers, all of those Days of Atonement, all of those days of Jubilee that led up to it, were but pointing to this great one who would come and by whose death and by whose righteousness there would be liberty, the proclamation of liberty, the release from all debts, the restoration of inheritances and ceasing from work. Those are all the effects of what the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished.

If you'll look with me one other portion of Scripture and then I'll be done, we'll have to come back to this because it speaks there of a twofold effect. There is the day of the vengeance of our Lord of which it speaks and we'll look at that next time, but one final verse over here in 1 Timothy 1. This is a verse that comes to mind when I think of jubilation, when I think of the acceptable time, acceptable to the Lord himself, accepted of the Lord himself, where in the incarnation of Christ, in his obedience and righteousness, in his sufferings in death, in his sacrifice and satisfaction, we see all of the glory of God revealed and his purposes fulfilled, his covenant of grace that he set forth from eternity confirmed and his people saved. It's not that he'll try to save his people, but he shall save his people. It is summed up here in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of," what? "All acceptance," the acceptable year of the Lord, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."