

**Isaiah 61:1-9 (NKJV)**

**1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;**

**2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,**

**3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."**

**4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations.**

**5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner *Shall be* your plowmen and your vinedressers.**

**6 But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast.**

**7 Instead of your shame *you shall have* double honor, And *instead of* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs.**

**8 "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant.**

**9 Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, And their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, That they *are* the posterity *whom* the LORD has blessed."**

Before we even begin to explain this passage we need to read another.

**Luke 4:16-21 (NKJV)**

**16 So Jesus 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 to read.**

**17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:**

**18 "*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To***

*preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;*

<sup>19</sup> *To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

<sup>20</sup> **Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.**

<sup>21</sup> **And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**

I love passages like this. There is never any question about how to apply them. Our passage this morning is about Jesus. But why did He stop where He did? I think we probably all know the answer to this. The next phrase was **And the day of vengeance of our God.**

We have learned in our study of Isaiah not to assume that we know how everything plays out. And this is a perfect example. When we read Isaiah it looks like this is describing a single event. If we were an ultra literalist what Christ said would be fighting words. We would condemn Him for not taking this text and applying it based on the full context. And we would be completely and eternally wrong.

We need to do our best to understand the Bible. But we must go about the process humbly. The best scholars in Israel at the time of Christ probably would not have broken this passage into a part 1 and part 2. But Christ, the **writer of all scripture**, did exactly that. And there is nothing in the text to warn us that this was a 2 part series. I think that is what allows us to be tentative in our interpretations. There are a lot of people who are very dogmatic about the one and only way these passages should be taken. And I think they sometimes tread on dangerous ground.

Now we know that verses 1 and 2 are about Christ's first visit and the rest concerns His future return.

Now, **what word** would you say God uses most to describe Christ's visit to our planet?

**Luke 2:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of **great joy** which will be to all people.

**1 Peter 1:8 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with **joy inexpressible** and full of glory,

**Matthew 2:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with **exceedingly great joy.**

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**Luke 1:14 (NKJV)**

<sup>14</sup> And you will have **joy and gladness**, and many will rejoice at his birth.

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**Luke 1:44 (NKJV)**

<sup>44</sup> For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb **for joy**.

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**John 15:11 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that your joy may be full*.

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**Acts 8:8 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> And there was great joy in that city.

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**Acts 13:52 (NKJV)**

<sup>52</sup> And the disciples were **filled with joy** and with the Holy Spirit.

Certainly joy is not the **only** word used. But it is surely an important word. Christ's coming was **to bring joy**. It was to allow for joy in places where joy is a rare commodity.

Sometimes we believers can be the worst advertising for our Lord and Savior. And I don't intend this as a light hearted rebuke to be cast off easily. How do we represent our Lord and Master in our every day events? Really? How do we do it? Do we face life with this **joy** described in our passages or do we not? Do we see that we are the most blessed people on this globe or do we not? There is no sense running for the first "yes, but" we can find. We need to answer the question. Would someone with a dvd of our life and words and subtitles of our thoughts this week think that, yes, I want a Lord like this person has? I want joy like this person has? **I want the confidence about a good outcome this person has?** (And I think that is the basis of joy) Or would they say, that person does not even believe what they say. The Bible doesn't seem to have an effect on that person. That person does not really believe any of the promises they quote to others. Which is it really? Joy? Or unbelief?

This is what is real. It doesn't matter what a single person here or any where else thinks. All that matters right now is what is true. Are you a believer or aren't you? Do you have joy or don't you? Do you believe God or don't you?

<sup>1</sup> **"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the**

**brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*;**

Now remember Christ said this. But He did not do this in some of the ways we would think. He did not walk into the physical prisons and set the prisoners free. That is probably what the Jewish people expected. They were looking for Christ to overthrow their political adversaries. They were looking for a political release. But the release that Christ provided was a million times more important.

Christ preached to the poorest of the poor. He walked the streets and ministered to all that could hear. He preached on mountainsides that anyone who could walk could get to. There was no airfare needed. There were no motels. Anyone could go that could walk.

And who were the brokenhearted? Well there was the woman with the issue of blood that the hospitals couldn't help. There was the centurion with a servant that was dying. There were suffering people all over the place.

And how about liberty to the captives? There were the demoniacs who were tortured by the demons that possessed them. There was the woman at the well who was captive for the search for love that was never met. There was Mary Magdalene who was probably captive to a lifestyle and reputation that she would never have escaped apart from Christ. There were the tax collectors bound to their status of enemies of Israel. There were the pharisees bound to their legalisms. Christ reached all of them.

And we can all see ourselves in their shadows. Who of us have not been **poor in the things of God**? Who of us have not had our hearts broken by our pursuit of advantages for ourselves apart from the leading and provision of God? Who of us have not been captive to a sin and a prisoner that needed set free? We are all right there. We are all the ones **Christ was anointed for** ministry for.

Do you see the point? We all need a savior. We are all a mess. Even when things were going well for us. Even when we seemed to be popular and everyone wanted to be with us. Even if that happened to us, we were still in this list. We were just too dense to see the truth. We all need healing and liberty and freedom. Because we were all enslaved by our sin.

**<sup>2</sup> To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,**

Jesus stopped at the first part of verse 2. If I were the guy that divided the verses by numbers, I think maybe I would have had the good sense to divide verse 2 into 2 parts.

Jesus said at the end of verse 2 A that He fulfilled that prophecy in the day He spoke it.

Again, no one would have guessed that this scripture would be broken in two parts. But it was. And Jesus was proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. It was the year that He was residing on planet earth. He was right there. But that was more than His unbelieving audience could endure. And that is not at all unusual. Believing God is always contrary to flesh. It always goes against our old nature.

But **there** Jesus **was**. And **here** Jesus **is**. Reaching out to meet the hurting and the heartbroken and the captive and enslaved. And here **we are**, His hands and feet to reach out as representatives of His.

We can see why Jesus stopped halfway through this verse.

### **John 3:17-21 (NKJV)**

**17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

**18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

**19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

**20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

**21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."**

Now verse 2 goes on. **And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,**

Verse 2 is when Christ finishes the job. If you don't think that God is a God of vengeance, you don't know God. Every sin committed is a blatant offense against the honor of the Creator of this universe. All the people living on this globe, thinking that they can live this life with the sole goal of maximizing their pleasure and minimizing their pain, are offending their God continually. We need to keep this in mind. We need to understand that they need to hear from someone who cares about them. They need to be warned about the danger, and welcomed into the state of acceptance, by this loving and vengeful God.

Just like last week we see the end state of comfort to the mourners. We need to understand that some of these mourners are mourning the loss of their loved ones killed by the enemies of God. Some are just waiting for eternity when their mourning can end.

**<sup>3</sup> To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."**

True spirituality involves heaviness. And it is a heaviness that is blessed by God.

**Matthew 5:3-12 (NKJV)**

**<sup>3</sup> "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>4</sup> Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.**

**<sup>5</sup> Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.**

**<sup>6</sup> Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.**

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**<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.**

**<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

There is a cost for spirituality here and now. We see the world from God's perspective. And it hurts. And we see our own lives and the decisions we have made from God's perspective. And it hurts. Longing for eternity in this present life involves aching. We ache with regret. We ache with repentance. We ache as we watch others offend God. We ache with desire for what is ahead. We ache with the consequences of living a godly life in an ungodly land. We ache for restoration. We ache. And that is a sign of Spiritual Health. God has us in mind. When He returns for judgment He will relieve the ache His children have. He will console the mourning. He will relieve the pain in the hearts of His children. **And we will get to to do the greatest trade in of all history. We trade in our ashes and we get beauty. We trade in mourning and get the oil of joy. We trade in the spirit of heaviness and we get the garment of praise.** To quote John Prine, How lucky can one man get?. We are seen as the planting of the Lord that Christ might be glorified. That is our destination. All of the pain, all of the unsettledness is headed toward an absolutely great destination.

Look at the phrase "**beauty for ashes**". There are certainly some very beautiful women in the spotlight in every generation. We look at their beauty in our culture as being glamorous. The most beautiful are almost worshiped. There appears to be nothing like ashes in their lives. It is all skin and cameras

and twitter and fame and wealth. But God's kingdom is opposite. What leads to beauty is not at all beautiful or popular or photogenic. What leads to beauty is despair over sin. That is where the ashes are.

We are not good at this. We don't even understand as a culture what we should be dressed in sackcloth and ashes for. We defend and flaunt those behaviors that are offensive to God and dishonorable to humans. We talk about our rights and we defend our depravity. But if we had any sense we would be covered in ashes. Men and women would be bawling like babies over the decisions they have made. We would be wailing like people who had just given away something of great worth to get nothing of value in return. We don't, but we should. And that is where real beauty arises. That is where **good looking** from God's perspective **starts**. It comes from the deep guttural cry that asks Oh God, what have I done. I have sinned against you. I have dishonored you. Oh please forgive me. It is from there that the beauty arises. It is **to that pain** that the comfort is directed. Oh, God is so good if we will just admit the truth about ourselves to Him. He is so willing to heal us from our sins.

**4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations.**

Look at the wonder of this. Who is rebuilding the old ruins? It is the ones who have been the mourners. It is those who have been forgiven of their sin. It is **those who have been forgiven** who become **the experts at repair**. Why are we not surprised? Isn't that where **most** true ministry comes from? It comes from the conversion in our own hearts from **sin to forgiveness**.

Now what about the old ruins? Does this apply to us? I cannot imagine anything that would apply more. We can almost see it in the faces of those around us. There is the ruin of sinful choices and God dismissing beliefs. There is decay and ruin.

Bob Dylan has a way of stating truths about the world we live in. He says it this way.

Broken bottles, broken plates, broken switches, broken gates,  
Broken dishes, broken parts, streets are filled with broken hearts.  
Broken words never meant to be spoken, everything is broken.

Yes. Everything is broken. And it is believers who are called on to be the remedy to this situation in people's lives. But we have to be the ones who have **worn ashes**. We have to be people who have **come so clean** with our sins that when we tell them to others **we aren't at all pretentious**. We know

we are telling the truth and there is no way to save our dignity. We have got to know we are the royal screwups and that God was amazingly graceful toward us to save us.

When we **really get that** and **quit pretending** that we are good at all, then we become useful for rebuilding the lives of others. We become useful at helping those who are hurting. We become the repairers of the broken. And that is such a wonderful ministry. Everyone needs that ministry. Isn't it sweet to hear from another person that they understand what it is like to be like us. Isn't it sweet to be told that, yes, what we did was very bad. But we can still be very forgiven. Isn't it sweet for someone to tell us that God truly loves us **exactly as we are**, and pretending **to be different than we are** just puts obstacles in the process of restoration. Broken people need hope and we can be the ones to tell them that there is hope.

**5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner *Shall be* your plowmen and your vinedressers.**

**6 But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast.**

**7 Instead of your shame *you shall have double honor*, And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs.**

Look how the restorers are regarded. They are the heroes. They are the ones who will be served. They are seen as most honored. They are seen as the priests, as the ones who represent men to God. And as such they will benefit from those they have served. This looks kind of like some of the things Paul said about **how traveling evangelists** and **ministers** should be treated.

And look at the outcome in verse 7. By submitting to the word of God and the ministers of God, these people who were far from God give up their confusion. They lose their inability to make sense of life. And they learn to truly enjoy the blessings that God has given to them. As a result they prosper. And they have a joy now in their lives that will last forever.

Isn't that the ministry we are to be about?

And what about those who are carrying out this ministry?

**Instead of your shame *you shall have double honor*,**

Do you want a position of honor with God? Do you know **how to get it**? Pour yourself into the ministries that God wants done. See your life as being primarily for **being a servant** to the needs of others to restore their souls.

Give yourself over to the restoration of others wherever God places you. That is where the double honor is in the Kingdom of God. You become honored by



seeking service. You become first by being last.

**8 "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant.**

**9 Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, And their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, That they *are* the posterity *whom* the LORD has blessed."**

When you love someone, you listen closely to what they tell you about themselves because you want to know that. You want to know so you can act in a way that pleases them. You want to understand what it is that will please them.

Here God tells us what He loves and what He hates. And we should listen closely.

He loves Justice. Ultimately justice is **people being treated rightly**. Justice is when dad sees a child take a toy from another child and the child that took the toy is forced to give it back. Justice is when someone lies about us that they are forced to tell the truth to the same people they lied to. Justice is the process of proper interactions and relationships between human beings. We don't always think of that as justice. But justice is crucial for us to get along properly. It is a requirement.

Justice is people acting toward each other the way they are supposed to.

Justice is about right relationships.

God loves it when His people deal with each other in a right manner. God loves proper relationships between His people. God loves right living in His family.

Now what does He hate?

**I hate robbery for burnt offering**

Think about this. Burnt offerings were to be those things offered to God as a result of the people's sins. What this describes is intentionally stealing another person's animal, which in itself is a sin. And then offering that animal as an offering to God for sin.

If you want to anger God do this. **Pretend to be spiritual**. Pretend to be trying to please God. **Make a show of being spiritual**. But never repent of your sin. Never do business with what is going on inside of you.

Think about the scathing rebukes in scripture. They were mostly made to those who **pretended** to represent God but **they did not** submit to God. They made a show of doing spiritual **things**, but they were not spiritual **people**.

They **spoke** for God but **did not know** God, **did not obey** God, **did not**

**submit to** God. Do you want to do something that God hates? Act better than you really are. Pretend spirituality that you do not have.

This is really serious stuff. And it is worth a second look at our souls. The question that gets to the core of things is this. **What am I pretending to be?** If we will do business with that question we can find out if we are doing those things that God hates. What am I pretending? What am I knowing about myself but hiding so people will think better of me than I really am? We all do very well to make sure that we are not doing the things that God hates. What am I doing that people would be shocked to find out I am doing?

And we will end with this.

**I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant.**

This is what God promises to the people who have given themselves to the restoration of others. God promises to direct us. We know the primary means of direction is with His Word. But God does not limit Himself to that.

Sometimes we are given **divine guidance** in a way that is mysterious.

Sometimes we know that we should do something and we really cannot explain why. We know that what we feel inclined to do squares with the Word, but the Word does not explicitly tell us to do this specific thing. That happens. And it happens **more** to those who have given themselves over to **the doing of the things that God loves.**

And in all of this what do we have? What is the relational cement? God has made an everlasting covenant with His people.

Do you know what is so good about the covenants that God makes? In human covenants, the covenant is only as good as the word of the two human parties who make the covenants. There is a lot of room for error there. Marriage is a covenant and we know that a large percentage of them fail due to humans not doing what they said they would do. But the covenants that God makes only involves one party. God makes the covenant and does not require us to endorse it. Because God knows that such a thing is not required. God brings us into relationship with Himself and **He guarantees that relationship** based upon, not what **we** are but on what **HE** is. That is why He can say that the covenant is everlasting. It is not dependent upon us. It is only dependent upon Him. It is He who is the author and perfecter of our faith. Not us. And He never changes.

So are we excited for the trade that God offers? His beauty for our ashes?

Do we want to pour ourselves into the restoration of the broken?

Do we want to do what God loves and avoid what God hates? We have a week to prove it.