

Our God Saves: Live

A Vision of Freedom

Isaiah 61

Mark Vroegop

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 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 (Isa. 61:1-7).

There are many things that I eagerly anticipate in the new heavens and the new earth.

I can't wait for the absence of sin, suffering, and death. The prospect of living in a world where there are no goodbyes, nothing but joy, and seeing Jesus face-to-face is simply incredible. I can't wait to talk with Moses, Jeremiah, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul. And I look forward to getting some questions answered that will remain a mystery on earth.

One of the things I really hope is part of the new heavens and the new earth is the ability to see the scene on earth when the Bible was written. I'd want to "rewind the tape" and see what was happening, the mood of the room, or the dramatic turn of events. If mere mortals are able to have instant replay and slow-motion reviews, I'm really hopeful that we'll be able to do the same.

Think with me for a moment of the scenes in the Bible, that you'd like to be able to replay. What comes to mind?

I'd like to see the scene in Luke 4 where Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. It's a moment with an incredible swing of emotions. And it's a time when Jesus was nearly killed. It was the start of his ministry.

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." And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away (Luke 4:16–30).

There are too many things to explore in Luke's account, but the point for our time in the Word today is the fact that Jesus chose to launch his ministry by quoting Isaiah 61.

That should tell you that this text is pretty important.

Isaiah 61 is powerful distillation of the hopeful message of Isaiah, the ministry of Jesus, and the trajectory of history. And we can see three concepts that are central to the storyline of the Bible. They are the storyline for every Christian: Hope, Restoration, and Glory.

It's an incredible and encouraging text, but it's also a passage with some warnings in it. Because these themes only apply to those who receive the message of Isaiah 61. In other words, not everyone hears the Good News as good news.

1. Hope (vv. 1-3)

This chapter begins with a message of hope that is proclaimed and heralded by a messianic servant.

Notice that he describes himself as someone who is anointed by "the Spirit of the Lord." Throughout our study in Isaiah, we've witnessed this person or servant emerge from time to time – in chapters 42, 49, 50, and 53. He's not only the deliverer of God's people. He's a suffering servant. And he's also the one who fulfills the role in which Israel failed miserably. He is the new Israel, the fulfillment of God's plan.

We heard about him in Isaiah 11:1-5.

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 his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins (Isa. 11:1-5).

You can see in both of these texts (Isaiah 11 and 61) the connection between the messianic ministry and the presence of the Spirit. It's what the name Messiah means: the Anointed One. It's a person who lives on earth but who receives divine enablement. It's hopeful because the needs of mankind require divine intervention. Someone endowed with divine help can actually do something helpful. That's hopeful!

That's why the baptism of Jesus was so monumental. The Spirit descends upon Jesus and the Father announces, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16). That's why Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit, was so transformational (Acts 2). That's why the inspiration of the Bible is so important. We need more than just words in a book. We need a word from God (2 Tim. 3:16). There's hope when God intervenes. There's hope when God speaks.

Take note that the Anointed One's primary ministry is proclamation. The Messiah comes with a message of hope. But this is more than information. Notice that he's not just heralding news, his message leads to transformation. It's a message of change. That's why it's hopeful.

There are six statements:

1. To bring good news to the poor – The Messiah's message gives hope to those who are, according to Old Testament scholar Alec Motyer, "downtrodden and disadvantaged, helpless in themselves, and at the mercy of powerful people and adverse circumstances."¹ Why does this text start with the "poor"?

It's intended to make a point and illustrate it. The point is that hope is coming to those who need help – those who must rely on others. So, it can mean humble or dependent, similar to Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount when he says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). But we can't overly spiritualize, saying that it only means humble. He uses "poor" as a real example of this helplessness. To be "poor" means that you are often trapped in a vicious cycle and sometimes taken advantage of by others. The poor often feel deeply powerless and vulnerable. According to

¹ J. Alec Motyer, [*Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 426.

Isaiah 11:4, it is the poor who will be vindicated by the Messiah. This message begins with the promise of help to those who are desperate.

2. To bind up the brokenhearted – The Messiah comes to apply the hope of healing for those whose hearts are broken over the effects of sin in the world. Whether it's their own sin, the sin of others, or the consequences of sin in the earth, the Anointed One comes to provide the hope of healing.

"Brokenhearted" is a powerful term. It's the combination of two terms that mean "to shatter, smash, or break" and "the inner self – the mind, will, conscience, and heart." It's the place where you find yourself not knowing who you are, what will happen, or who you can trust. And the Messiah is able to begin the healing process.

3. To proclaim liberty to the captives...opening of the prison to those who are bound – This may refer to the figurative announcement of the Year of Jubilee. According to Leviticus 25, every fifty years land was supposed to return back to the original owner and slaves were to be set free. This may also have been a message of hope to those who were in exile. Here is the promise of freedom.

4. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance – The Anointed One will bring about the "Day of the Lord" which will involve both grace and judgment. It will be a day of salvation for God's people (see Isa. 49:8, 60:10) and a day of punishment for the wicked (Isa. 34:8, 63:5).

It's fascinating to me that Jesus stopped reading Isaiah 61:2 after the statement about God's favor, symbolizing that the judgment of God / the day of vengeance was yet to come.

5. To comfort all who mourn - The Messiah will bring the emotional help that is needed for those who are afflicted with sorrow. It's a fulfillment of what we read last week in Isaiah 60:20: "Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended."

6. To grant to those who mourn...a beautiful headdress, the oil of gladness, and the garment of praise – The Messiah will not only bring an end to mourning, but he'll also transform people with a new kind of life. From head to toe, they'll be marked by beauty and wholeness.

And the effect of this work will make a stunning statement. The people will be called "oaks of righteousness" – a strongly rooted majestic tree that towers over the forest. Their existence will communicate something powerful about the glory of God. The hope of their future is not just connected to the change of circumstances for hurting people. It's about a bigger story of God's glory being displayed.

If you are a Christian, you know that what Isaiah foretold is exactly who Jesus is and what he did. He helped the helpless, healed the brokenhearted, freed the spiritually imprisoned, provided grace for the needy, absorbed our judgment, comforted the weeping, and changed our identity.

Can I remind you that he is the fulfillment of this passage? Jesus is our hope. He's more than a concept, a philosophy, a theology, or a religion. Jesus is the Anointed One – God's messenger to announce the Good News.

Do you feel helpless? Look to Jesus. Brokenhearted? Look to Jesus. Imprisoned? Look to Jesus. Need? Look to Jesus. Under judgment? Look to Jesus. Sorrowful? Look to Jesus. Searching for your identity? Look to Jesus.

He's the Anointed One who brings hope. Jesus is the central figure in the storyline of God. That story starts with hope, and it includes restoration.

2. Restoration (vv. 4-7)

The result of the Messiah's message and deliverance will be a beautiful restoration. What follows in verses 4-7 are a series of divine blessings: renewal, peace, spiritual vitality, and joy

The first blessing is the renewal of what's been lost. Notice in verse four the reference to "ancient ruins, former devastations, ruined cities, and the devastations of many generations." If you were an Israelite during the time of the Babylonian exile, this would have a specific hope in mind: the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple.

Beyond the return of Israel after the exile, you can imagine the power of John's vision in Revelation 21 when he sees the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2).

The second blessing is the peace of God extended beyond Israel to all the nations. In verse 5 we see strangers tending the flocks and foreigners serving as plowmen and vinedressers. Again, this reminds me of Revelation 21 where New Jerusalem welcomes the nations as they bring in their glory and honor (Rev. 21:26). Instead of there being perpetual wars and battles, there will be peace.

Spiritual vitality marks the people as everyone is now a priest and they are spoken about as a minister of God. This is the third blessing. It's the promise of the New Covenant as promised in Jeremiah 31.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33–34).

The final blessing is joy. God will have brought about his plan such that the nations are now providing material support for all peoples. What's more, their shame will be removed with a double portion of blessing. This means that there is more than enough. There's so much good in this new world that it is overwhelming.

These are incredible promises, aren't they? When they were written to the people of God, they had no idea about the fulfillment of them in Jesus. They were all future. But with the coming of Jesus, he inaugurated this new kingdom – an already/not-yet realm of his rule.

This already/not-yet aspect of the kingdom means that there are some things begun but not everything is completed. The Messiah came. The Anointed One died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. The Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, and he filled both Jews and Gentiles. The church gathers today because of this reality. The restoration has begun! We wait for Jesus to return and finish his work on earth.

As a result, we look with hope toward the future. We know how the future ends. And we can marvel at the opportunity before us to live in light of this kingdom. But this also means that Jesus, the Messiah, is able to begin the work of restoration in you today. Receiving Jesus puts you into the family of God, and you become the recipient of his grace.

It's the storyline of God's people: hope, restoration, glory.

3. Glory (vv. 8-11)

This final section turns the focus away from the people of God. The spotlight shifts to God himself – what he loves, what he will do, and what it means. These short verses show us what Jonathan Edwards called “the end for which God created the world.” In a word, it's all about God's glory.

Notice that verse 8 uses the word “I” three times. God speaks. He loves justice. He hates robbery and wrongdoing. He will vindicate his people. God is going to make everything right. But the plan is more than just to balance the scales of justice. The endgame of God's activity is for another kind of communication.

In verse 9 we see that God's plan is to cause the world to marvel at his grace. God's glory is the end game. It's what was violated in the garden. It's why Jesus came. It's why he died and rose again. God's glory is why he's coming back. And the glory of God will be the central feature of the new heavens and the new earth.

This leads to worship in the last two verses. Before I speak to these verses, can I ask you, did you find your heart lifted in worship this week? Have you taken time to consider the greatness and the glory of God? If not, let this text do that for you.

Verse 10 is filled with praise! It's offered by the Anointed One. His mission is redemption, deliverance, and justice all under the banner of rejoicing. Hebrews says, “who for the joy set before him, endured the cross...” (Heb. 12:2). Righteousness is so characteristic of him that he describes it like clothing. It's a glorious image – one that is repeated in the book of Revelation.

Hope, restoration, glory. That's the storyline of God's work in the world. And our text ends with a glorious image of a new garden that is filled with new growth. But this garden is filled with

righteousness and praise that sprouts up before all the nations. This is the goal of God's activity through the Anointed One. It is to announce the hope of restoration to the praise of God's glory.

Do you need hope today? Some of you may need to be reminded of Jesus' ability to give you freedom.

Do you need to be reminded about God's ability to bring restoration? The mission of God is to bring a glorious change in the world and in your life.

Do you need to consider the glory of God? To be reminded that the storyline of history is headed toward worship.

Isaiah 61 is a powerful text. It's no wonder that Luke's gospel records Jesus starting his ministry with this text. But it's also a warning. After all, the people in the synagogue wanted to kill Jesus. Why? Because he warned them that often the people closest to the truth miss it. They become so familiar with it that they lose the ability to see and savor it.

The unsettling truth of this story is that the greatest danger to the way of God in this world is posed by those who are closest to it. Jesus is rejected not in Sodom and Gomorrah, but in Nazareth. He is betrayed not by the devil, but by one of the Twelve whom he chose. He is crucified not in pagan Rome, but in the heart of Israel at Jerusalem. The rejection of Jesus repeats the rejection of God in the history of Israel, whose ultimate adversary was not Baal worship or foreign nations, but "my own people who are bent on turning from me, declares the Lord" (Hos. 11:7). "[Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11).²

Let's not miss the message of Jesus as well.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com

² James R. Edwards, [*The Gospel according to Luke*](#), ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 142.