
Announcing the Year of Grace

Isaiah 61

When all the emphasis on the world is on gifts and getting and seasonal myths and music, it is right, it is an imperative that we celebrate what the incarnation is truly about.

I want to highlight God's grace through the announcement and the accomplishment of a wonderful, Old Testament text. Turn with me to Isaiah 61.

The Prophecy and Its Announcement (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Isaiah picks up the telescope of prophetic revelation and sees this wonderful day and person that has as its key feature, the year of grace and the day of wrath.

61 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;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ 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.

Its Appointment

(v.1)

God has placed His Spirit on this person so that he *is enabled* for the ministry he is to carry out. We find this developing in the book Isaiah in the following texts: Isaiah 11:1-2; 42:1; 48:16. So the Spirit of the Lord will rest on the Branch, the offspring of David and one the God's Servant, His chosen and beloved so that He and the Spirit can both be the ones sent by the Lord.

He is enabled by the Holy Spirit because He has *been appointed* to the ministry and its great tasks. The act of anointing in the Old Testament is one used to identify, set apart and install in an office. Thus, David is anointed as king signifying his identification by God as king the recognition required of the people. Anointing in the Bible has almost nothing to do with power for work but authority and office from God. Anointing in the Old Testament functions like ordination and the laying on of hands in the New Testament.

Its Activity**(v.1b-3a)**

So he is enabled and appointed for a ministry. This is the job description for that ministry. Here is the work that ministry will involve.

It is a *personal ministry* (v.1) to the downtrodden and the desperate. It is good news of a real release and deliverance. That ministry involves a *proclaimed message* (v.2a) of the mercy and severity of God. It proclaims both the year of God's favor and the day of God's wrath. What is finding favor with God all through the Old Testament is grace in the New. And it is a *transforming ministry* (v.2b-3a). What will be proclaimed gives people hope, exchanging their sin and sorrow for God-centered holiness and happiness.

Its Aim**(v.3b)**

This man, his message and his ministry, will have a magnificent set of aims. The first is *a mediate aim*. It is not ultimate but infuses such help and hope in the heart. Its aim is the good of God's people. It establishes them as tall markers for the second, *ultimate aim*. That ultimate aim is the glory of the person of God. Here is God then *appointing and enabling a ministry of help and hope centered on the proclamation of God's grace and favor and God holiness and wrath all for our good and His glory*.

What are we to make of this? This text raises two important questions in our minds.

To whom is this referring, Isaiah or to someone else?

When will this happen?

The Lord and His Accomplishment (Luke 4:14-30)

We know the answers to both those questions. The answer does not surprise us for we have been dazzled by the presence of Christ all through the Old Testament. And in this case, we have a direct use of Isaiah 61 by the Lord set in the context of Luke's gospel.

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ "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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ 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. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² 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?" ²³ 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.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away.

I want to remind you that the gospels are not a series of self-contained snapshots of Jesus' life. Luke presents the material in the order and fashion he does following a purpose. So it is with real concern for this that I come to these paragraphs. Luke is showing us in chapters 1-9 (12 occurrences of the word or its cognates) the amazement of those who observed Jesus' life and ministry and their rejection of His message of the cross and salvation for all the people groups. The book concludes with the disciples being told the amazing thing of the resurrection.

Its Inception

(v.14-16)

The second emphasis in Luke's writing is the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus receives the Spirit after His baptism (3:22), is led by the Spirit into the

desert where He is tempted (4:1) and then begins to minister in the power of the Spirit (4:14). This is how His ministry is begun.

Luke presents Jesus as Spirit filled and Spirit empowered for reasons that relate to the Old Testament prophecies and His Messianic office. He ministers with God's approval and power even in the face of both amazement and murderous rejection. This ministry begins in Galilee (v.14-15) accompanied by widespread news and acclaim, highlighted in Luke by His teaching. That wider ministry now turns and centers on His hometown (v.16).

Its Identification

(v.16-21)

Luke details the regular habit of Jesus – He goes to synagogue on the Sabbath and participates in the reading of the Scriptures. From the language it is clear that the congregation expected Him to teach after He had finished reading His selection. His teaching in the synagogues in Galilee had brought Him recognition and praise. So the expectations were high.

According to Luke, He selects the text from Isaiah 61 that we have just read and considered. He reads it, returns the scroll to the attendant and then, sits down to teach. In one short sentence He turns the spotlight of that prophetic text on Himself. "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Some commentators detect significance in *where Jesus stopped quoting*. Jesus has come inaugurate year of God's favor and grace. Full stop There will yet be a day when He will come to inaugurate the day of wrath. What is Jesus doing and saying by ascribing this test to Himself and His ministry?

He is claiming to be God's appointed and Spirit enabled Messiah who is both the voice of God's grace and eventually, God's wrath. Jesus is clearly identifying Himself as the One to whom Isaiah is pointing. He has effectively said, "I am that One." Luke uses this as a beginning to point to identify Jesus as the fulfiller of all the Old Testament.

He is describing the nature of His ministry and defining what can be expected of Him. If He is the appointed and enabled One, then here is the ministry He will do. And it is chiefly a proclaiming ministry. He is to preach (v.18) and to proclaim (v.19) what God is doing in salvation and redemption.

Later Jesus in His ministry and Luke in his argument will show that Jesus is not only the proclaimer of God's grace and the gracious purchaser of redemption as the sacrificial substitute for sin.

Its Interaction

(v.22-27)

Luke begins to show the initial response to Him. There is wonder and awe (remember Luke's motif here) at Jesus' gracious speech and difficulty with their very familiarity with Him. Notice that they are not yet wrestling with the claim He is making. They are not marveling that He claims to be the messiah. Rather, they cannot understand how the local carpenter's son speaks with such gracious words.

That is why Jesus says what He does in verses 23-24. He expects that they will demand authenticating signs of His claim. It is not enough that He has the Scripture and the Spirit and God's stamp of approval. "Prove yourself here like you did elsewhere."

Then Jesus turns to say that He does not expect to be accepted and acclaimed. At first He seems to be talking about His own hometown until you listen carefully to what He is saying. No prophet is welcome in his hometown and then goes on to show that the hometown is not just Galilee, but all Israel. Notice that there were lots of widows in Israel and lots of lepers in Israel, but God sends Elijah, the prophet outside of Israel to Gentiles. One of the thing that marks the widow of Zarepath and Namaan, the Syrian is *they believe God's Word*. If you look at the accounts, these Gentiles accept God's Word and thus acknowledge God's prophet.

Here is the indictment on His own hometown and by extension on Israel. Luke presents it to show that Jesus is not just the savior and sovereign of Israel, but of all the world.

Here is an authentic and authorized One from God who speaks for God (and is in fact, God) and *He is rejected*. His rejection at home, both by birth and by nation is part of God's sending of Him to the Gentiles. And the Gentiles will accept Him. What Israel has done all through history in rejecting God and His messengers, is now happening with God and His Son, the Messiah.

Here is the Word of God and its fulfillment right in front of them and its glorious message of the time of God's gracious favor, *they do not believe*. The widow in Zarepath believes. Namaan the Syrian believes. But Israel will not believe.

This becomes the challenge to them and to us. Here is God's Son, appointed by God and enabled by His Spirit who stands as the grand reality of which all in the Old Testament is shadows and types and pointers. Here is the one illuminated by the Word. Believe the Word. Bow to Him. Be amazed, not at His signs and miracles, but at His saving work on the cross and sovereign exaltation to the crown.

Its Indignation

(v.28-30)

We are sure that this is what Jesus meant and how Luke intends for us to hear this because of how the people in the synagogue reacted. In one short paragraph they move from expectant amazement to murderous anger. They were outraged. They knew exactly what He was saying and what He was accusing them of.

See, this is something that we simply cannot allow to happen. People want to say that Jesus is a good man, a great teacher, a marvelous healer and even a prophet and spokesman for God. But everyone around Him understood that He was claiming to be the Messiah and to God. The almost universal rage and anger at those claims mean that this is how Jesus saw Himself and what He Himself claimed. So away with all the nodding foolishness of Jesus being good but not being God. No man is good who is not God and yet claims to be God.

Now the congregation turns into an enraged mob. They gather Jesus up and hustle him to a cliff on the outskirts of the city in order to throw Him over and kill Him. Make no mistake. They intend to destroy Him. What interests me is that He does not slip away from them until they are at the cliff. In other words, there is no mistaking their intent. It is obvious because they are here with hate in their hearts and murder in their wills. But it is not yet time.

Reflect and Respond

We have before us the Word of God. The Word of God so clearly shows us Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior and our Sovereign. He has proclaimed the year of God's gracious favor. We now live in that time and age. From Isaiah to Luke the great message of the gospel, the proclamation of release from our sins, their guilt and condemnation, demands that we believe and bow. That is the challenge before you today. Will you reject Him or will you believe Him?

That gracious favor of God in a fully provided salvation is what we ought to be celebrating in this season of the year. We have the gospel preached to us and our release from sin proclaimed to us here. We were once blind, but now we see. We were once dead, but now alive. All because of God's great and glorious grace in Christ.

This is what we announce to the world...