

## ISAIAH 61 MESSIAH'S MISSION AND MANIFESTO – PART I

This entire chapter very properly follows the preceding one, in beautiful sequence and contrast! Chapter 60 contained an impressive representation of the Church militant and triumphant, in the heights of its glory – like a mighty Temple covering the whole earth. Now, in this chapter, we are conducted (so to speak) into the porch or vestibule of this Temple. And behold! It is adorned with five beautiful pictures – each one wondrously illustrative of the work of Him Who “loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-28).

“The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 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!” (verses 1-3) These words are not speaking of any prophet, preacher, or evangelist; rather, they are a clear prophecy of the Lord Jesus! And to support this fact, we have the most conclusive of all testimonies; for our Savior Himself declared that these words spoke of Him. He inaugurated His public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:17) by taking these very words from Isaiah’s prophecy as the text of His first public sermon. Having read them from the Scripture-scroll, it is said that “he closed the book” and then stated, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears!” The first public speech of a great leader or political figure is regarded with peculiar interest, for it is the key of subsequent utterances. What sublime interest must be attached, then, to the opening sermon – the initial manifesto – of the Prince of Peace! Of Him, it was declared, “Never man spake like this man!” He – the true Teacher of His Church and people – is here brought successively before us, under the names and representations of Evangelist, Healer, Liberator, Messenger of Jubilee, and Comforter of the Mourner! Let us consider each of these in their order; and in doing so, may that same Spirit of the Lord be upon us, and enable us to listen to the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

The first picture of the Messiah which arrests our attention is that of a Divine Evangelist or Teacher, with a group of docile learners at His feet. They are of a childlike spirit; they look up with the eye of faith; they stretch out the

### Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A description of the Messiah’s character and office – verses 1-3
- ❖ Promises of the future blessedness of Christ’s Church – verses 4-9
- ❖ The Church praises the Lord for these mercies – verses 10-11



hand of faith; and their minds are prepared, as the furrows of early springtime, for the reception of the immortal seed. The Holy Spirit has anointed Jesus, in the first place, “to preach good tidings unto the meek.” The first element of a renewed and regenerated nature is a realized consciousness of utter helplessness, the lack of real righteousness and life, and the acknowledgment that all is to be received as the gift of free and unmerited grace. We remember that on one occasion, Jesus set a child in the midst of His disciples; and He pointed to that childlike spirit – with its surrender of self and self-will – as that which best qualifies a person for entering the Kingdom of heaven.

In the vestibule of the spiritual Temple, the next picture that we see is a crowd of broken-hearted persons. They have tears in their eyes; and in the agony of conviction, they are crying out, “What must we do to be saved?” These mourners are suffering from the true cause of all sorrow, which is sin. They are filled with a broken-hearted sense of their alienation and estrangement from the true Life and Life-giver, and the dreadful forebodings and shadows of a dark eternity hanging over them. But Jesus is represented as coming to such persons in the character of a wise, gracious, and gentle Physician. Regarding every imaginable kind of spiritual sickness, He says, “Jehovah-Rophi! I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Ex. 15:26). “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3). Let none tremble as they weep tears of contrition! “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17).



Next we lay our eyes upon the picture of a prison. Through its iron bars, we discern a band of forlorn captives. They are all bound with chains; they are pining in apparently hopeless servitude, and sighing for the free air and the bright light of heaven. It is the worst of all captivity, for it is spiritual bondage. Moral and spiritual chains are galling them; and the wailing cry rises from lips that are pale with despair, “O how wretched we are! Who shall deliver us?” They are all bound by that fear of death which makes them subject to bondage all their lifetime. But Jesus is represented as a Divine Warden approaching the dungeon, with the keys of deliverance at His side! He makes a general proclamation of “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound!” But then, in addition, He gives help and strength and comfort to each individual soul – conveying a special message to each “prisoner of hope,” in all their tribulations. He says to them, “I will make my grace sufficient for thee; I will perfect strength in weakness!” Thus, as His spiritual free-men – ransomed by His blood, and protected by His grace and power – Christ sends them forth from their cells and their chains, “compassed about with songs of deliverance.”

*(continued in Part 2)*



## ISAIAH 61 MESSIAH'S MISSION AND MANIFESTO – PART 2

The next picture that we behold in the spiritual Temple has a definite Hebrew reference. We see a crowd of Jewish servants; and some of them – according to the law of Moses – have had their ears bored through, in token of perpetual servitude. Others are debtors who are cowering under the glance of their rigorous creditors. And still others are those of noble blood and pedigree; but by misfortune or crime, they have forfeited their hereditary possessions. The scene and time of this picture is set in the Year of Jubilee – that well-known season of emancipation and joy which occurred every fiftieth year in Israel. But now, the true Proclaimer of that glad festival – the Messiah-Deliverer – approaches! And with a sound that is far better than the music of the silver trumpet, He proclaims “the acceptable year of the Lord” – a year of grace – and also “the day of vengeance of our God!” What a glorious proclamation of release for all who are in spiritual slavery! The dungeons of condemnation are thrown open, the debts of a guilty past are remitted, and the forfeited possession of God’s favor is restored! But there is an impressive warning that is also conveyed in this picture and proclamation. The Year of Jubilee only came once in a generation. To the Israelite, its blessings and immunities were restricted to that one year alone. And in a truer and far more solemn sense, this is the case with every sinner. “The acceptable year of the Lord,” or “the day of grace,” will not last forever! The blessing that is ours today may be gone tomorrow; the fetter that may be unbound today may be tightened tomorrow; the debt that may be remitted today may be beyond the power of cancellation tomorrow; the blast of the silver trumpets of freedom which may be heard today may be silent tomorrow. As soon as the day of mercy is ended, the Great Creditor can grant no further discharge; and then shall come “the day of vengeance of our God!” Now is “the acceptable year of the Lord!” “Behold, now is the day of salvation!”

Once more, as a concluding picture, we have another representation of a crowd of mourners. The previous group of sorrowful souls were mourning on account of sin. But this group is a picture of a far larger crowd, who suffer from all the various ills which our sinful flesh is heir to. These people pine in poverty, are racked with pain and sickness, are wounded with cruel disappointment, suffer worldly loss, grieve under heartless treachery, endure selfish unkindness, are hurt by faithless friendship, and bear up under unmerited wrong. They also sorrow from bereavement, and lament for their dead. They include the Rachels who are “weeping for their children,” and the Ezekiels whose dear wives have been “taken away by a stroke.” They are pictured as being seated, like the patri-

### Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A description of the Messiah’s character and office – verses 1-3
- ❖ Promises of the future blessedness of Christ’s Church – verses 4-9
- ❖ The Church praises the Lord for these mercies – verses 10-11



arch Job, in beds of ashes; they have dust sprinkled on their heads, and their garments are torn and disheveled. In times of mirth and gladness, when their circles were still unbroken, it was very different with them. Their heads and faces were then glistening with the oil of joy. They had a tiara or turban around their brows, beautiful garments upon their persons, and sandals upon their feet. And these festal days are to become their own once more! The Anointed Messiah – He Who was “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows” (Ps. 45:7) – has a glorious errand to every mourner. Who is so qualified as He is for this errand? He combines the might of Deity with the sympathies of humanity; and thus He is able to understand all the various cases of suffering among His people, and to enter with tender sensitiveness – as their own Brother – into every pang that breaks their heart.



What is Christ's proclaimed mission? He has come to give His redeemed sons and daughters beauty – a bridal diadem or coronet – instead of the ashes that they formerly sat in. He has come to pour the oil of joy upon their heads, and to take away their causes for mourning. He gives a garment of praise – or songs of praise for His Divine goodness – to those who, in “a spirit of heaviness,” have been sitting in the dust and refusing to be comforted. And these things, moreover, He is “to appoint unto them” – that is, He is to give them to them as a permanent thing that can never be revoked. The world's balms, balsams, sedatives, and solaces have nothing enduring in them. It is of the Great Physician alone that it can be said that He “forgiveth all thine iniquities” and “healeth all thy diseases” (Ps. 103:3). He alone had the right to utter His own Beatitude: “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” And now, as we survey this wondrous picture-gallery in the vestibule of the “Beautiful Gate” of the great spiritual Temple, what is the great truth that is brought home to us in all of its blessed power and reality? It is that which should never weary us by its simplicity or repetition: namely, that Christ is a great, gracious, and all-sufficient Savior! Here in these verses, we have every emblem of sin, misery, and sorrow combined; and over each picture, we can read these gleaming letters: “He healed them all!” (Matt. 4:24)

Have we personally claimed all the blessings of Jesus' great Salvation? The opening verses of the chapter are Christ's words. But are the closing verses *our* words? In glad response to this gracious unfolding of His ability, willingness, grace, and power, let us sing aloud, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels!”

*Thank You, Jesus, for being the Liberator of Your captive people; as well as the Evangelist, Healer, Messenger of Jubilee, and Comforter of the mourner! Amen.*