

All Saints Talk for 16 June 2024

The Power of Godly Vision. Vision for Renewal — Callum Houston

Isaiah 61:1-4 The year of the Lord's favour

The Year of the LORD's Favour

61 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,^[a]
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.
⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

From the first verse, Isaiah 61 is steeped in the New Testament, steeped in Jesus.

So, bear in mind that we are only covering four verses today, but within those four verses we will learn about how God wants us to find him, an explanation of Jesus' promises to us and the blueprint to the Christian Way of life.

Yes, that's a big claim I am well aware. Don't worry, I haven't gone 'completely' mad...yet.

So, to kick things off, let's go through those four verses one at a time and get a rough idea of what God is promising to Isaiah... to us.

Verse one - The Lord proclaimed Himself to be upon the prophet because the Lord had anointed him.

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim freedom for the captives

and release from darkness for the prisoners lines up very closely with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5.

Verse Two - He will come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour - His Kingdom

Verse Three - He promises to comfort all who mourn,

and provide for those who grieve in Zion - If this sounds familiar it's because this entire verse, like the first verse of this chapter, also lines up very closely with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 -Garland instead of Ashes = Reward in Heaven

Verse Four - The Lord here promises to rebuild that which is ruined, to restore His people, His World.

So, you may have noticed that a lot of what Isaiah mentions here lines up closely with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 but there is one more thing we need to consider to really get to the core of what God is trying to tell us through His prophet.

Remember Jesus is the fulfilment of, the key to, the scriptures. Imagine if we could ask Him directly what Isaiah 61 means... Well, this time, we're in luck because in Luke 4.v.14-17 Jesus Himself reads Isaiah 61 in a Synagogue and

explains precisely how it applies to Himself. (So yes, I am stealing somebody else's idea for this sermon).

So, what does THE Expert have to say? He proclaimed the year of the Lord's favour. Whatever on Earth that means!

This was actually a much bolder statement than you would think, not only was he declaring his Messiahship in a very bold way in a synagogue no less! but he is also declaring the beginning of his Rule (the arrival of His Kingdom on Earth), His new 'Messianic age', something which only God Himself could declare! He also implies a mission to the Gentiles as he comments on How his own people won't recognise who he truly is, blind as they are.

Back in Isaiah 61 we also note that the year of our Lord's favour comes before his vengeance...his Judgement - it's the period where salvation is offered freely to all nations and peoples, when our Lord intercedes for our transgressions - before His day of Judgement comes.

Now, looking over at the beatitudes we see Jesus' Salvific promises:

He has come to bind up the brokenhearted, to restore us - or as Isaiah put it "To restore places long devastated"

Just like Jesus raised up the Temple of His body, to us he offered to build back up that within us which is in ruins, That is to say those things - lost to Sin.

Jesus has come to rebuild us in His image by placing His image within us. To offer us the chance to be made new - freed from the curse of death and suffering.

So we have promises and prophecy, but how does any of this apply to our everyday lives?

Well, to apply the Bible to our lives, to live Biblically, we need to look at the Good Book slightly differently to how we might be.

The Bible is many things but at its core it's a story...The story of Jesus.

This means that while the individual people mentioned in the Bible can feel distant and irrelevant, like how could the story of Isaiah, this man who lived over 2000 years ago not feel distant!

But we must remember that the Bible isn't Isaiah's story or any man's for that matter but all of our story for all time.

And it certainly doesn't end with the Book of Revelation, it's God's story - and this means that the story of the Bible is going to continue in and through us until the day of the Lord's Judgement. The Bible is the story of all of our lives, so when Jesus invites us to partake in it, he is calling us to partake in His life, to share in His suffering, His passion and His love, so that he can live within us and rebuild our hearts as new Temples to His glory from which he will restore us, He will reinhabit the abandoned places in our Hearts.

With Him in us we may restore the world around us - That his Kingdom may come and His will be done.

Together with God, and His grace we may share in the year of the Lord's favour.

With this in mind we need to ask ourselves: How exactly can we live in the Lord's favour?

How can we be restored?

How can we be like Jesus?

Now these are HUGE questions but using Isaiah 61 I'll try to offer some insight into the answers.

And luckily he gives us the answers over and over again to these questions to make sure we really understand them: First is faith, faith in His promises...and faith takes patience...and patience, my beloved, takes Love, a love like Jesus', a love shared by Elisha and Elisha who were willing to scandalise themselves by

helping widows and the lepers because of the Love of God (a calling the raise up the outcast/downtrodden, to be Healers of the Heart like Jesus) - The nature of Jesus' love is very beautifully described St.Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13.04:08

The next ingredient is grace, His outflowing love through the Holy Spirit which is upon us, which we were given free for all time on Pentecost.

Grace gives us freedom from those things which bind us and keep us away from Him (from pain, shame and guilt by giving it all to Him), and in return He brings us into His mercy (That's a pretty good deal if you ask me!). Grace gives us the Lord's strength to become more like Him, to live in Harmony with the world -Ive seen it with my own eyes on the Alpha Course

When we live Biblically, we partake in the year of the Lord's Favour which was declared for us all the way back when Jesus read and completed this scripture in the Synagogue in Luke 04:19 - At that moment he gave us Himself as the key to the Scriptures of Old.

Looking again at Isiah with Jesus as our key to unlocking the Old Testament and our blueprint for how to live in the Lord's favour (to emulate His promises for others), what the Lord was declaring through Isiah becomes more apparent.

Of course, God heals us and renews us to be more like Him, but we must remember that our personal renewal is a part of God's wider plan. He will restore His children one by one that we will share in His life, share in His story, so that we may be restored enough to proclaim Good News to the Poor (be they poor in spirit or financially) and Freedom to Captives (be they victims of slavery or slaves to sin) and God's divine kingship over all things. We're called to Christ to restore creation, to quite literally save the world (no small task then!) and in order to do that we must first restore ourselves, to have Jesus established firmly as the cornerstone of our lives upon which we become the living bricks which build up the kingdom.

Lastly I wanted to quickly discuss something many people who read the Bible often wonder: Why is it so hard to understand, and why couldn't God be more direct, spell things out for us a little clearer?

Explain: In order to really make sense of the Bible we need to be a bit 'mystical', to approach things like one of those old Mediaeval monks who lived and breathed scripture... Cloud of unknowing - Dark wisdom - He and His will aren't something we learn intellectually or with our heart alone but with our Levav. God needs to speak unutterable truths to us, so sometimes it takes a bit of work on our part. God wants to be really sure we understand Him, we must work to mine the diamonds of His wisdom. Our reward is free...but that doesn't mean we don't have to go up and get it. So when you find the Bible tricky, that's great, it means you're uncovering divine wisdom and living in the Lord's favour.