

**Study Notes: Isaiah 61:1-3**  
**November 27, 2022: “The Savior Came to Heal Our Brokenness”**  
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**Background:** Isaiah 61 is one of the many songs or poems of prophecy found in Isaiah. In this song, Isaiah speaks of one (the Messiah) who would come and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. This song is about the Lord’s plan to restore that which sin has broken, and to set things right again. These verses were especially significant in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ because He read them while teaching, and claimed that He was the one who fulfilled these verses (Luke 4:21).

***The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.***

- Throughout Isaiah, there was a character who was sometimes referred to as the “Servant of the Lord” (see also Isaiah 42:1, 48:16). This individual did the work of the Lord, by the power of the Lord’s Spirit. At points in Isaiah, the Servant sometimes referred to the whole nation of Israel, and to Isaiah himself, but it is clear that the Servant’s ministry was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who Isaiah prophesied about in Isaiah 11:1-2.
- In this case, the Servant had been anointed and set apart with a purpose. That purpose was to proclaim good news to the poor.
  - The Faithlife Study Bible explains the idea of anointing, “Anointing symbolized conferring of holiness and authority. Kings, prophets, and priests could all be anointed to signify that they had been set apart and selected for that specific role.”
  - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary adds, “His anointing with the Spirit of God provides a link with both the kingly and the servant prophecies of this book (11:1; 42:1). Both earlier pictures refer to a ministry through speech (11:4; 49:2). If this person is both king and servant, then already within Isaiah that union of the two in Jesus Christ is anticipated.”
- The rest of the song would flesh out what the good news that the Servant announced was (and who would benefit from it) but it is clear that the Good News was, in fact, the same Good News of the Gospel that Jesus would announce to the people; that there is salvation available.
- In the song, those who received the Good News were described as poor, brokenhearted, captives, prisoners, and those who mourn. While many scholars attempt to use these identifying adjectives to link this ministry to a specific time period in Israel (i.e the time in exile, or a time at war with other nations), it is impossible to do so because the terms were all general in nature.
  - The New American Commentary helps explain some of the terms and what they describe, “The audience is made up of the ‘afflicted’ (‘ānāwîm), a term that can refer to anyone who is oppressed by others or humble before God. The broken-hearted are despondent in spirit and discouraged, probably the people in 57:15 that God will revive. The reason why they are broken-hearted is unknown, but physical, social, or spiritual problems might cause this condition. ‘Captives’ (from šēbî) could refer to those taken as prisoners in a time of war or those bound for economic or spiritual reasons.”

***He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,***

**to comfort all who mourn,  
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.**

- As the song continued and described the Servant's ministry, several contrasts are drawn between what was and what will be.
  - Binding up the brokenhearted is a reference to Psalm 147:3 and speaks of the healing work of the Messiah. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary explains the terms, "*Bind up* means to 'bandage', speaking of a personal ministry of soothing and healing. *Brokenhearted* is a word covering any and every human breakdown, emotional prostration, the conviction of sin."
  - Proclaiming freedom and releasing captives and prisoners refers to setting people free from any enslavement, be it physical or spiritual. This links the ministry of the Servant to what was known as the Year of Jubilee (see Leviticus 25).
  - Proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance, refer to the day of the Lord. The judgment will fall upon the wicked, but the compassion and grace of the Lord will fall upon those who are seeking it. The New American Commentary notes, "These events appear to describe what will happen on the Day of the Lord when 'our God' begins to reign in power in his new kingdom."
  - Comforting those who mourn is a reference to earlier themes in Isaiah (see Isaiah 57:18-19). This speaks of a time of healing and peace from that which causes mourning.
  - Bestowing a crown of beauty...and a garment of praise is an outward way to describe an inward change that is taking place. The New American Commentary explains, "This metaphorical way of describing the outward transformation of a person's clothes and behavior betrays a deep transformation of this person's situation as well as their psychological reaction (by their 'spirit' *rûah*) to the changes God will introduce at this time (60:20, 'the days of mourning will be completed'). The point is that mourning, which was so often a part of the nation's history, will end and praise will begin. The head ornament (a positive symbol) will be used 'instead of' the ashes (a negative symbol) because a new era of salvation has arrived."
- In speaking of the ministry of the Servant, the NIV Application Commentary explains, "He will make of His people what they cannot make of themselves."

**They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendor.**

- The last verse of Scripture identified the people of the Lord, calling them oaks of righteousness and planting of the Lord. This imagery speaks of a people who are well rooted and will bear the fruit of righteousness.
- The New American Commentary states, "This purpose clause indicates that one of the main goals of mankind will be to fulfill this joyful responsibility of glorifying God forever. Those who receive God's good news, freedom, comfort, and experience this transformation will have many reasons to loudly praise and glorify God's name."