

Salvation Has Come!

Passages: Isaiah 61:1–3

Luke 4:14–21

As we've seen over the past few weeks, Isaiah had a lot to say about Jesus! In fact, Jesus' birth, life, death and even His resurrection were all prefigured by this prophet! And that's why the ancient church used his prophecies as key markers to create a calendar by which we might systematically ponder the wonders of these God-events, one by one, through the year—a calendar by which **our lives** might be rooted in the rhythm of **Jesus' life**.

Today, we finish up our studies in Isaiah by looking at a key text that not only **defined** Jesus' entire life and ministry, but it's also a text which eventually got Him crucified! It's found in **Isaiah 61, verses 1–3**.

“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 broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour 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 splendour.”

You may not realise it, but this passage from Isaiah 61 draws heavily on imagery from Leviticus 25 and **the Year of Jubilee**; a year when all private land was returned to its original owners, all debts were written off and all those who sold themselves into slavery were set free! This was **“the year of the Lord's favour”**, when the destitute and the down-trodden were lifted up and those who made serious economic mistakes in the past were forgiven and their lands and status restored.

If I put this into modern terminology, you'll soon see what a radical sort of idea the Year of Jubilee really was! Every 50 years, all those people who had 'maxed-out' their credit cards would have their old cards torn-up and new ones issued...totally free of debt! All those who were slaving away to keep up with a mortgage that they should have never taken on – suddenly the bank says, "Have the house– your entire debt has just been cancelled!"

Now you might think, 'That's not fair! These people got into debt through their own stupidity!' Well, in the Year of Jubilee, allowances were to be made for people's stupidity. People no longer had to live with the consequences of their past bad decisions! It's no wonder why, in the words of Isaiah, this was 'good news to the poor'! The good news was that they were not going to be poor any longer. Indeed, the whole idea of Jubilee sounds absolutely amazing, doesn't it? It's sheer grace! And it reflected the sheer grace of Israel's God!

Well, the sad fact is that there is **no** evidence to say that the nation of Israel ever carried out a Jubilee! And you can understand why not! I mean, the very people in Israel who would have been responsible for seeing that this law of Jubilee was carried out were the people who had the most to lose from the process! The leaders of Israel were the rich, ruling class for whom a Year of Jubilee would have been a huge economic loss!

Having said that, however, it's true to say that the hope for a Year of jubilee still remained...particularly amongst the common people of Israel! They still held onto the hope that, one day, a great restoration would take place in Israel. They held onto the hope that Messiah would come to set God's people free from the consequences of their past mistakes and foolish behaviour. They still believed that, one day, He would initiate the Jubilee and finally bring equality and harmony to the land. In other words, it was the common people who held firmly to the vision given in Isaiah 61!

It's only when you understand this important background to Isaiah 61 that you can truly appreciate the incredible divisions that began to occur from the moment when Jesus, arriving in the synagogue of Nazareth (His hometown), picked up the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, deliberately found this contentious Messianic passage, and read it out loud! Then, He sat down (as all rabbis did when they were going to preach) and calmly exclaimed to one and all: **'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'**!

Do you see? Not only was He was telling the people that that He was the living fulfilment of Isaiah 61, the Messiah, but that He was going to personally see to it that those who had made bad economic choices in the past would be offered a fresh start; those who had sold themselves and their family into slavery to pay off debts would be released to begin life again; and those who were oppressed by the weight of their past mistakes, failures and sins would finally be forgiven them all! **Jesus was literally proclaiming that, through Him, the Year of Jubilee was now about to begin!**

Now, as I said earlier, it was this passage from Isaiah 61 that would set Jesus on the road to crucifixion—and I mean that! Why? Just think about it! **On one hand**, there were many who got incredibly excited when they heard these words. After all, they had heard the many reports of Jesus' miracles throughout the surrounding region and probably thought, "Perhaps this kid from Nazareth really is the Messiah!" And so, verse 22 says that...

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."

And those who would have been most excited by Jesus' pronouncement were the many poor and disadvantaged people in Nazareth who would have been thinking: "If this guy really is the Messiah and He comes from here, then He should initiate the Jubilee for us, first! After all, don't local physicians heal their own

people first? That's how it should work! Locals first!" So, they said to Jesus:

"Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum." Give us a few miracles, Jesus! Show us your stuff!

On the other hand, however, there would have been many who were not so impressed with Jesus; those who would have felt threatened by the words He spoke in the synagogue that day. I'm thinking of wealthy land-owners and slave-owners—those who had profited from the misfortunes of others to increase their own land and slave holdings! (Even the people who built and attended the synagogue in Nazareth would have probably been of the more wealthy class.) Jesus' words about a Year of Jubilee would have been a challenge to their power. And so, at first, they merely mocked him:

"Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. Who does He think He is?

Then, as Jesus spoke about the way that His ministry would reflect the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, including the Gentiles in this Year of Jubilee, they immediately began to consider far more violent tactics: (vv 28–29)

"All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff."

The point is this: The Year of Jubilee was a subject of great controversy in Israel—one that divided the rich from the poor, the haves from the have nots, the land-owners from those who, out of bad choices, lost their land...and it divided Jews from Gentiles (who didn't think the Gentiles should have any rights in Israel!)

When you understand this, you'll see why Jesus' life was often at risk! Clearly, the Year of Jubilee was the bedrock of His teaching and the motivation behind His actions! With whom, after all, did

Jesus spend most of His time? With whom did He eat His meals? Who did He seem to favour in His discourses and discussions? If you don't know the answer, then just listen to a few words from His most famous sermon—'the Sermon on the Mount', found only two chapters later in Luke 6:

20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

24"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. 25 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets...

Try as you might, these words cannot be 'spiritualised'! What Jesus is talking about here are tangible issues-- economic issues—issues of justice and equality.—issues that flow from Jesus' understanding of **the Year of Jubilee**; when the rich would be brought down and the poor lifted up.

In fact, from here to the end of Luke's Gospel, this was the key subject that Messiah Jesus would not only be repeatedly embroiled in, but the one over which He would lose His very life! While the poor, the foreigners and the much-despised sinners **increasingly turned** to Jesus and honoured Him as Messiah and King of Israel, the people of wealth and power (the Pharisees, religious leaders and Chief Priests) **increasingly opposed** Him... for principally one reason: He challenged their comfortable positions of authority and power with His teaching about the Year of Jubilee! They understood what it would mean if this Jubilee was

inaugurated: it would mean a reversal of the status quo...and they hated Him for it!

But, let me say one thing at this point: The Year of Jubilee was not some early form of Marxism! It was not a plot whereby the downtrodden people would be encouraged to overthrow the ruling classes. Rather, the 'Year of Jubilee' was a voluntary scheme whereby the people of God would hear God's voice! By God's persuading Spirit, the people of Israel would agree with God's plan to bring all humankind (Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female) back to a place of freedom and unity in the mutual enjoyment of the fruit of God's good earth! The idea was that all would prosper together; all would share equally in the goodness of creation! For this was the way the triune God intended for the world to be in the first place—a world for all people to equally enjoy! But for that level of peace and mutual prosperity to occur again, it would require that some people (the poor) be raised up while others (the rich and powerful) be brought down, not by pitting anyone against another but by a mutual acknowledgement of the overall good of community! The goal had always been one of equality! All the **Year of Jubilee** was doing was restoring the world to its pre-fall condition by erasing all economic advantages and disadvantages so people could, once again, dwell as one family in the harmony of God's abundant provision...just as it was in the Garden of Eden!

So, let me say it again-- **Jesus was killed for trying to institute the Year of Jubilee!** But, let me also add one more amazing truth to this—**Even though they succeeded in killing Him, the game was not over!** Even though the rich and powerful, the high and the mighty, may have killed Him, His Father raised Him back to life! **Why?** So that He might continue to bring in the **Year of Jubilee**, not just in Israel, but over the whole earth!

And how would a resurrected Jesus do this? **Through His church!** We, the people of the Messiah, have been filled with the same Spirit and called by the same heavenly Father to step into Jesus'

ministry and engage in His work of ushering in the **Year of Jubilee**... one small step at a time, wherever we find ourselves! It is our job to call the world to repentance and faith...that all humankind might bow the knee to Jesus, the Lord of Jubilee!

It's interesting that there is only one place in the Bible where we see the Year of Jubilee being celebrated—and that's in Acts 2:44-45! **“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”** That would have been a living example of the Year of Jubilee, and it's no wonder why 3000 souls were converted that day! For the very first time, they personally witnessed the Year of Jubilee in Israel!

Can the church succeed in promoting and living out this Year of Jubilee? Only as we push to bring the issues of equality and justice to bear in the world around us...as we push for all people to mutually honour each other and equally share in the goodness of God's earth (as well as preserving its bounty for future generations)... we testify to the fact that the life of the resurrected Jesus is pulsating through us! We know that the Year of Jubilee has come!

But, of course, we will never see it come in its fullness...at least, not until Jesus returns! For the fact is that **the year of Jubilee** will only be fully established on earth on the day when Jesus comes through the clouds to reclaim all creation for Himself! That will be the day when (just as Isaiah prophesied) He brings to perfection “the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells”. On that day, every knee will finally bow to the Lordship of Jesus, the Messiah, and all creation will be restored to God's original intentions.

Until that day comes, let us remember this passage from Isaiah 61...and may our church purposefully reflect the heart of Jesus, the Lord of Jubilee: **“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 broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ,² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour!"

In Jesus, the Year of Jubilee has begun! Let's pray that we will continue it... until the day it is universally completed at His return.