

TWO REASONS TO REJOICE

61 *The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, because Jehovah has anointed me to preach good news to those who are afflicted. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners. ²[He has sent me] to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor and the day of our God's vengeance. [He has sent me] to comfort all who mourn—³to minister to those who mourn in Zion: to bestow on them a crown of beauty in place of ashes, the oil of joy in place of mourning, the garment of praise in place of the spirit of despair. Then they will be called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by Jehovah, so that he may be glorified.*

⁴*They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places that were formerly devastated; they will repair the ruined cities that have lain devastated for generations. ⁵Strangers will stand watch over your flocks and feed them; foreigners will work your fields and your vineyards. ⁶But you will be called The Priests of Jehovah; men will identify you as The Ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of the nations, and you will boast in their riches. ⁷In place of your shame [you will receive] a double portion—instead of [suffering] disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance. They will possess a double portion in their land and everlasting joy will be bestowed upon them; ⁸because I, Jehovah, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a family whom Jehovah has blessed.*

¹⁰*I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head [with a turban] like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹As the soil makes the sprouts to come up and a garden causes the seeds sown in it to grow, so will the Lord Jehovah cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations. (Isa. 61:1-11)*

Introduction

In Isaiah 61 a messenger from the LORD suddenly appears and announces his divine calling: *"The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me."* Here is someone anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to carry out the divine calling entrusted to him.

This messenger now describes his calling in the following terms. He has been commissioned *"to preach good news to those who are afflicted."* The Hebrew word, עָנִי, often rendered "the poor" also has the meaning "the afflicted," which is preferable in this context. He has a message of good news from the LORD God for those who are afflicted, those who are suffering the consequences and burden of their sins. He has been sent *"to bind up the broken-hearted."* That is to say, he is sent to minister healing and soothing comfort to those who are of a broken spirit and a contrite heart, as Psalm 34:18 indicates, *"Jehovah is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a contrite spirit."* His ministry is one of proclaiming

“liberty to the captives.” He has come to announce release and freedom for those held prisoner and enslaved by a hostile, tyrannical, and demonic power; indeed, he has come to announce that the door of their dungeon cell has been opened and they are called to come forth into the light of divine freedom and life.

This divine messenger goes on to assert that he has been called *“to proclaim the year of Jehovah’s favor and the day of our God’s vengeance.”* He announces that the date has arrived at which time the LORD will show mercy and favor to His people, and take vengeance upon those who oppress them and hold them captive. He has come *“to minister to those who mourn.”* Again it is emphasized that his calling is to minister the comfort and assurance of the LORD to those who grieve over their sins and their estrangement from God. Finally, his calling is *“to bestow on them a crown of beauty in place of ashes, the oil of joy in place of mourning, the garment of praise in place of the spirit of despair.”* His task is to remove their mourning apparel, their humiliation and shame, their spirit of depression, and in exchange cause them to receive a crown of beauty and honor—to become filled with the joy of the LORD, and to be filled with praise to God.

The results of the Messiah’s redeeming work, and the effect it has upon God’s people, are now declared in verse 3b and verses 10-11. In verse 3b we are told, *“Then they will be called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by Jehovah, so that he may be glorified.”* With their God-given righteousness the redeemed will resemble mighty oaks. They shall be planted by the LORD in His land, rooted into the life of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. These stately oaks of righteousness shall adorn the kingdom of God and shall be for His own glory—redeemed by Him, planted by Him, reflecting His glory by their fruit and in their stature.

Verses 10-11 go on to further express the results of the Messiah’s work:

I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head [with a turban] like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹As the soil makes the sprouts to come up and a garden causes the seeds sown in it to grow, so will the Lord Jehovah cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations. (Isa. 61:10-11)

Let us now consider these Two Reasons to Rejoice as they are presented to us in Isaiah 61.

I. Rejoice in the LORD, Because He has Clothed You with Righteousness (Isa. 61:10)

It is a terrible thing to stand before God exposed in the nakedness of our sin, as Isaiah discovered on the occasion when he suddenly found himself standing in the immediate presence of the LORD: *“Then I declared, ‘Woe to me! I am ruined!—for I am a man with unclean lips and I live among a people with unclean lips, and*

my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts” (Isa. 6:5.) Note the reaction of mankind on that great and awesome day when the LORD appears as the Judge of all the earth:

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17)

Throughout the ages men have sought for ways to conceal their sinful nakedness from the sight of God. Some have sought to do so by denying their sin. Proverbs 30:11-14 speaks of people who engage in the vilest and cruelest of sins, and yet they protest their own innocence, they *“are pure in their own eyes,”*

There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers; ¹²those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth; ¹³those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful; ¹⁴those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind. (Prov. 30:11-14)

Others have sought to excuse their sin. Rather than taking full responsibility for her sin, Eve sought to shift the blame completely upon the serpent: *“And Jehovah God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’”* (Gen. 3:13.) In the same way, rather than taking personal responsibility for his failure to heed the LORD’s command to wait for Samuel to offer the appointed sacrifice, Saul blames the people for pressuring him into offering the sacrifice:

“What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, ¹²I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought Jehovah’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” (1 Sam. 13:11-12)

Still others have sought to minimize their sin. Of those in this category, some, like the Pharisees, have sought to do so by comparing themselves favorably to a notorious sinner:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” (Lk. 18:11-12)

Others have sought to do so by limiting the demands of God’s moral law to mere external actions, a mistake the Lord Jesus corrects when He taught the true depths of the law’s requirements upon our lives:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell ... ²⁷You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28)

Then there are those who have sought to establish their own personal righteousness. The Apostle Paul, prior to his conversion, tried his utmost to establish a personal righteousness before God:

... although I certainly have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks that he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more reason. ⁵I was circumcised on the eighth day, I come from the nation of Israel, I am of the tribe of Benjamin, I am a pure Hebrew; with regard to the law, I was a Pharisee. ⁶As far as zeal is concerned, I persecuted the church. With regard to the righteousness that a man can attain by the law, I had become blameless. (Phil. 3:4-6)

But his sincere efforts all the more confronted him with the presence and the depth of his sinful human nature, as he confesses,

I would not have known what sin was except through the law; for I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." ⁸But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. (Rom. 7:7-8)

When Paul was confronted with Christ in His absolute righteousness, Paul was compelled to abandon the effort of producing his own righteousness as the way of salvation: *"whatever things were gains to me [his personal merits and endeavors listed in verses 4-6], these things I now regard as losses on account of Christ. ⁸But much more than that, I regard all things as losses on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Phil. 3:7-8a.) The knowledge of Christ Jesus to which Paul refers is Christ's perfect acquaintance with righteousness. Recorded in John 8:29 is our Lord's personal testimony concerning His relationship to His Father and His Father's commandments: *"The one who sent me is with me; he has not forsaken me; because I always do the things that are pleasing to him."* Then in John 14:30b, Jesus testifies that the devil has no accusation whatsoever that he can bring against Him, and can find no point in which the Lord Jesus is susceptible to sin: *"the prince of the world is coming. He finds nothing in me."*

The only solution to our dilemma is to become clothed with the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ—this is what Paul discovered and of which he testifies in Philippians 3:8-9

But much more than that, I regard all things as losses on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him—not having my own righteousness that is derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God received by faith. (Phil. 3:8-9)

This is what Isaiah foresees, this is what he describes in verse 10 of chapter 61, and in this he rejoices: *“I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head [with a turban] like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”*

As believers in the Jesus the Messiah, let us rejoice in the fact that the LORD has clothed us with His own perfect righteousness. To appreciate the significance of this, contrast Revelation 6:17 with Revelation 7:9,13-14. On the day of final judgment the nations of the world shall cry out before the judgment throne of God and of the Lamb, *“the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?”* (Rev. 6:17) But those who have received the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be able to stand on that great day, (note: the white robes symbolize cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ and being covered with Christ’s righteousness):

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands ... ¹³Then one of the elders asked me, These in white robes—who are they, and from where have they come? ¹⁴I answered, Sir, you know. And he said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9,13-14)

II. Rejoice in the LORD, Because He will Cause His Righteousness to Triumph (Isa. 61:11)

As a Christian, we can look at ourselves and become discouraged. Consider the confession of the Apostle Paul:

I do not understand what I do. What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do ... ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing ... ²¹So I

find this principle at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²In my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:15,18-19,21-25a)

But as Christians we can be encouraged and rejoice when we consider our destiny as it is defined for us in Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, because Jehovah has anointed me to preach good news to those who are afflicted ... [He has sent me] to comfort all who mourn—³to minister to those who mourn in Zion: to bestow on them a crown of beauty in place of ashes, the oil of joy in place of mourning, the garment of praise in place of the spirit of despair. Then **they will be called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by Jehovah, so that he may be glorified.** (Isa. 61:1,3)*

As a Christian, we can look at the state of the world and become frustrated and discouraged to the point of despair. Consider the testimony of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk: *“Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. ⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted”* (Hab. 1:3b-4.)

But as Christians we can be encouraged and rejoice when we consider the final destiny God has appointed for His renewed creation as it is defined for us in Isaiah 61: *“As the soil makes the sprouts to come up and a garden causes the seeds sown in it to grow, so will the Lord Jehovah cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations”* (vs. 11.) What Isaiah speaks of here is the same thing the Apostle Peter presents in 2 Peter 3:13, *“according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”*

Prior to the fulfillment of these great promises it is important for us to have a biblical perspective on why the LORD presently withholds the final judgment that will usher in the revelation of that righteousness. For one thing, the LORD desires to give men the opportunity to repent; *“The Lord is not negligent in keeping his promise ... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”* (2 Pet. 3:9.) Furthermore, the Lord is willing to allow evil to become fully ripe for judgment, as the Psalmist points out:

How great are your works, O Jehovah, how profound are your thoughts. ⁶The brutish man does not know, fools do not understand, ⁷that when the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, it is in order that they may be destroyed forever. (Psl. 92:5-7)

Finally, the LORD desires the gospel to go forth into all the world so that men might be introduced to Christ the Savior and His redeeming grace, as the Lord Jesus testifies in Matthew 24:14, *“this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

But we have the LORD’s sure promise that His righteousness shall at last triumph with an everlasting triumph—and that is reason for us to rejoice!

As the soil makes the sprouts to come up and a garden causes the seeds sown in it to grow, so will the Lord Jehovah cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations. (Isa. 61:11)

Conclusion

As we consider Isaiah 61 we discover two great reasons why the Christian may and should rejoice: 1) we may rejoice because the LORD has clothed us with His righteousness; and 2) we may rejoice because the LORD will cause His righteousness to triumph. Together with the prophet Isaiah, may we testify to one another and sing to the LORD:

I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness ... ¹¹ ... the Lord Jehovah will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations. (Isa. 61:10-11)