

## **“A Garment of Righteousness . . . A Garment of Blood”**

**Isaiah 61:1–63:6**

Cheri Bean

If you are as old as I am, you may recall a television show entitled “You Are There.” It was a pioneering CBS series that existed from 1953-1972 that was hosted by Walter Cronkite. It was known for reporting pivotal historical events and it featured reenacted on-the-scene interviews with historical figures. It blended education with drama, and it was famous for Cronkite’s closing line: “What sort of day was it? A day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our times. You Are There.”

What reminded me of this old, but landmark show was reading the ancient words of the Old Testament which were prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 61 and then jumping ahead into his prophesied future by some 700 years at the pivotal moment in history when Jesus announced His ministry by reading the same words that are repeated in the New Testament in the Book of Luke, Chapter 4.

Jesus had returned to His hometown of Nazareth. I am sure the townspeople had heard of the amazing things He had done in Capernaum. When the Sabbath came, everyone assembled in the synagogue. Being a traveling rabbi, as was the custom of the day, He was invited to read from the scrolls. Jesus stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He opened it to the very place we are considering now and read:

*<sup>1</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on me,  
because he 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,  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor . . .”*

Here in the middle of verse 2, Jesus stopped reading. He rolled up the scroll, returned it to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes were on Him and He said, *“Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

I am sure, at that moment, you could have heard a pin drop. If I was seeing this event in an episode of “You Are There,” I would expect to see and hear interviews of eyewitnesses and hear their reactions as to how they were feeling about Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, who was now all grown up and declaring that He was the fulfillment of the prophecy – the one for whom the Jews had been waiting for so many centuries. Of course, the closing line of the episode would be: What sort of day was it? A day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our times. You are there!”

**What an understatement that would be for this divine event!** We know after Jesus made His announcement; the world would never be the same!

Earlier I mentioned that during the reading of the Scripture while in the synagogue, Jesus read verse 1 and started reading verse 2, *“to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”* and he stopped the reading of verse 2 before proclaiming the *“day of vengeance of our God.”* That begs the question, *“Why did He stop there?”* Many scholars believe the next phrase deals with the judgment and wrath of the Tribulation which wouldn’t take place until Jesus’ *Second Coming*.

Andrew M. Davis stated, *“These words Christ did not read because He will not fulfill them at this time. He most certainly will in His *second coming*, when He returns to earth to slay the wicked with the sword of His Word (Rev. 19:11-16). The warning about the coming wrath of the Lord is mixed right in the middle of the sweet passage from Isaiah 61:1-3, and it is right for the messengers of the gospel to warn sinners of the coming wrath so that they might flee to Christ.”*

Jon Courson shared, *“Because Jesus chose not to read this phrase when He came the first time, I believe He knew even as He began His ministry that He was involved in a two-phase event – coming first as a **suffering Savior** before He would return as a **conquering King**.”*

### **Chapter 61 - What the Messiah Will Do**

Verses 1-3 of chapter 61 inform the reader of both the anointing and the mission of the Messiah. Isaiah prophetically writes about the Messiah in verse 1 who is anointed by the LORD. Men can anoint with oil, but only God can anoint with the Holy Spirit.

We know that no other was so powerfully anointed as Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that the word *“Messiah”* means *“Anointed One.”* I know we can all remember the account of Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptizer as told to us in Matthew 3:13-17 and the special affirmation Jesus received when He came up out of the water when the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove and alighted on Him. And a voice from heaven said, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.”*

Chapter 61 clearly delineates the *“Anointed One’s”* sevenfold mission given to Him by the Father: 1) to preach good news to the poor, 2) to heal the brokenhearted, 3) to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners, 4) to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, 5) to proclaim the day of God’s vengeance, 6) to comfort those who mourn in Zion, and 7) to give them a crown, oil, and splendid clothes in place of their ashes of degradation and captivity. The Messiah accomplishes all these things by preaching good news.

The good tidings that He is preaching includes healing the damage that sin brings. Sin impoverishes, breaks hearts, makes captives, causes oppression. Sin is a crime that must be avenged. It is clear that the mission of Jesus in proclaiming the **year of the LORD’s favor** and doing astonishing miracles of healing was a direct fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-3.

The year of the LORD's favor is the opening of a **worldwide era of grace** from Almighty God, in which the debts of sin can be cancelled and prisoners can be set free to worship God in joyful liberation.

According to Warren W. Wiersbe, the background of this passage is the "Year of Jubilee" described in Leviticus 25:7. Wiersbe simplifies the passage in these words:

*"Every seven years, the Jews were to observe a "sabbatical year" and allow the land to rest. After seven sabbaticals, or forty-nine years, they were to celebrate the fiftieth year as the 'Year of Jubilee.' During that year, all debts were canceled, all land was returned to the original owners, the slaves were freed, and everybody was given a fresh new beginning. This was the Lord's way of balancing the economy and keeping the rich from exploiting the poor."*

And finally in verse 3, we see the restored place of God's people is glorious. In her days of rebellion, Israel was like a fading oak and a waterless garden (Isaiah 1:30), but in the kingdom, she will be like a watered garden (Isaiah 58:11) and an oak tree. All of God's people should be His trees (Psalm 1:1-3), *"the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."* He saves them for His own glory.

In Isaiah 61:3-9, we read of the transformation of the poor, brokenhearted, mourning, ash-covered captives whom Jesus has come to save. Jesus Christ has removed their disgrace and their chains. David Guzik in his "Enduring Word Commentary" tells us:

*"Because sin brings grief, Jesus will comfort all who mourn. Instead of **ashes of mourning**, He gives His people **beauty**. Instead of the **mourning** itself, He gives His people **the oil of joy**. Instead of the **spirit of heaviness**, He gives His people **the garment of praise**."*

## **Chapter 61 - What God's People Will Do**

Verse 4 tells us that God's people will rebuild what is in disrepair:

*"They will rebuild the ancient ruins  
And restore the places long devastated;  
They will renew the ruined cities  
That have been devastated for generations."*

God is in the business of restoring ruins. He wants to use His people to restore and rebuild. Even if the destruction has stood for many generations, God can use His people to rebuild; with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the ministry of the Messiah, God's people will be rebuilders. One example of this is Nehemiah, who organized and rallied the people, took the rubble of Jerusalem's walls, and rebuilt them.

## Chapter 61 - God's People Will Be Set Apart to Serve the LORD and Receive His Blessings

Exodus 19 tells us it was God's original intention that the people of Israel be a nation of priests. Because they rebelled against God, they lost their calling. When Jesus returns, Messiah's people are given a role as "the LORD's priests." They will have a holy occupation and God will provide others to take care of the flocks and to be their plowmen and their vinedressers. Where the Messiah's people had once been disgraced, they will be held in honor and recognized as the LORD's blessed covenant people. Instead of shame, they shall rejoice in their portion. Everlasting joy shall be theirs.

In verse 10, we "hear" the voice of Jesus Christ declaring His supreme delight in His Father who has clothed him "with garments of salvation and arrayed Him in a robe of "His righteousness," as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" ... The Father has indeed prepared His Son to be Savior of the world.

Chapter 61 closes with these words in verse 11:

*"For as the soil makes the sprout come up  
And a garden causes seeds to grow,  
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness  
and praise spring up before all nations."*

Verse 11 gives Jew and Gentile alike the hope that we can delight in God's blessings and that we can grow and flourish in the era of the Lord's favor and grace.

## Chapter 62 - A Glorious Future for Zion

My small group has always had a passion and questions about the future of the Jews. Chapter 62 provides a picture of Jerusalem and its people that gives us insight to a bright future for Jerusalem and its people.

According to David Guzik, Isaiah prophesied in a time when Jerusalem, while spiritually corrupt, was a functioning city. Although Isaiah saw a time when Jerusalem would be desolate because she would be conquered by the Babylonians, God, through Isaiah, prophetically speaks comfort and assurances to her despairing citizens. The LORD assures them that He will not rest until Jerusalem is restored to a shining righteousness. This prophecy is directed toward Jerusalem as an actual place, but in a broader sense, it represents Israel and all of God's people. With this information in mind, let's review verses 1-3:

*<sup>1</sup>For Zion's sake, I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch  
<sup>2</sup>The nations will see your vindication,*

*and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.  
<sup>3</sup>You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand.  
A royal diadem in the hand of your God."*

In these verses, God promises to not rest until Jerusalem's righteousness and glory are visible to all nations. She will receive a new honored identity from the Lord. Jerusalem is depicted as a crown of beauty in God's hand.

It is also evident that other nations are to be affected even influenced by the change in Jerusalem as her vindication becomes known. Kings will call her by her new name of "*Hephzibah*" which means *My delight is in her* and "*Beulah*" which means *married*. No longer will the city be named "Forsaken" or "Desolate."

Isaiah conveys the loving relationship the Lord has with Zion in verse 5. "*As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*" God rejoices in His people with the joy of a bridegroom.

The love that the Scripture is talking about is not a love of obligation. It is a love of rejoicing. In fact, God rejoices in us. He doesn't have to love us. This same idea is conveyed in Zephaniah 3:17: "*The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.*"

No wonder Paul made a special prayer that we could somehow begin "*to comprehend such love, that we may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge...*" (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Because God loves and rejoices over Zion, He will protect it and to this end - He posts watchmen on Jerusalem's walls. These prayer warriors are to give themselves and the Lord "no rest" until God's people and His city are restored (verses 6-7). This Scripture along with the parable told by Jesus of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) in which a widow repeatedly asks an unjust judge for justice until her persistence forces him to grant her request, teaches that **believers should always pray and not give up. If truth be told, persistence in prayer is a demonstration of faith in God's ultimate justice, rather than a way to annoy a reluctant God. We must not get weary in prayer.**

The Lord also swears with His right hand and strong right arm to make Zion prosperous. He speaks of never giving her enemies the grain and wine that belong to her (verses 8-9). No more will Jerusalem be plundered by those who would steal her grain or new wine. Instead, those who have gathered it shall eat it.

Verses 10-12 speak of the time when the LORD will fulfill His promises as His salvation is coming. A highway must be built up and made smooth without obstacles and hindrances that is

ready to usher people to the LORD's salvation. A banner must be raised for the nations. The end result is that God's "Holy People," the "Lord's Redeemed," will be called "Sought After," and the "City No Longer Deserted." Everyone will know Zion was valued and chosen by Almighty God (verse 12).

We cannot ignore this **message of salvation** that we've seen repeatedly in Isaiah. It is a clear missionary thrust. We should be traveling on the highway to Zion and inviting others to travel with us by telling them of the good news of Jesus Christ and how salvation can be theirs!

### **Isaiah 63:1-6 The Lord's Terrifying Day of Vengeance on His Enemies**

The content of the first six verses of this chapter is certainly in contrast to the preceding section. Having soared with the vision of the heavenly Zion in Isaiah 62, we now descend to the terrifying reality that the vision has not yet been realized. God's passion is the only strand of commonality that is similar between chapter 62 and the first six verses of chapter 63. We trust that Christ will rescue us from the coming wrath, but still the words are fearsome.

Isaiah 63:1-6 is a dramatic, prophetic vision of the Messiah returning as a triumphant warrior from executing judgment on Edom and Bozrah which is mentioned as the capital of Edom. Both represent God's enemies. As we saw in Isaiah 34, Edom represents all the godless nations, those in rebellion against God. When the "year of the LORD's favor" comes to an end, the "day of God's vengeance" begins (Isaiah 61:2).

The Messiah appears in blood-stained garments, and He is striding vigorously, filled with energy in verse 1. A questioner asks, "*Who is this one so powerfully "striding in his formidable might?"*" The Messiah answers, "*It is I, proclaiming vindication, powerful to save.*" The Lord executes His wrath with awesome power, and in perfect righteousness.

In verses 2-3, the questioner asks Him, "*Why are your clothes red?"*" The answer is, "*I trampled the winepress alone . . . I trampled them in my anger; their blood spattered my garments.*"

"*The day of vengeance is in My heart.*" (the words of verse 4) were prophetically spoken by Jesus. They sound so foreign to us because we rarely think of vengeance being in the heart of Jesus, but we are reminded "*the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*" (John 5:22).

Isaiah 63:5-6 tell us that the work of judgment was Christ's alone. While He will be accompanied by heavenly armies (Revelation 19:14), the work of judgment is His alone. In an act of finality, He poured out their blood on the ground.

The Second Coming of Christ that we see in Revelation 19:11-16 is the fulfillment of the blood-spattered warrior of Isaiah 63. There Christ is slaughtering His foes with the sword coming from His mouth and He treads the winepress of fierceness and wrath.

## Closing Thoughts

### Specific lessons from each chapter:

Chapter 61 is a reminder to praise our Almighty God and Savior for our many blessings.

Chapter 62 serves to encourage us to be persistent in our prayers and to never give up.

Chapter 63 is a call to pray for God's plan of Redemption and that His will be done.

As we near the last pages of the Book of Isaiah, my appreciation of the characteristics of our Lord and Savior that I had not known before we tackled this study has grown by leaps and bounds. Jesus possesses two remarkable, contrasting traits that remain vividly in my mind. I think of Him as the Gentle Servant on one hand who atones for our sins. On the other hand, I see Him as the Mighty Warrior who judges the world.

In God's great plan of the ages, Jesus accomplishes two things on His own. First, He atones for our sin. He alone hung on the cross, bearing all of the weight of all our guilt. Second, He judges the world alone. He doesn't need us to execute His ultimate judgment; we can leave that to Him.

Of course, we have a part to play in God's great plan of the ages and it comes with a sense of urgency. Our part is to spread the good news about Jesus Christ and the salvation that is offered to every soul before the end of the era of the Lord's Favor and before the day of God's Vengeance. We don't know how many days we have on this earth. It seems to me that our time may be shorter than we think.

And finally, lest we leave chapter 63 in an awkward and blood-spattered spot, David Guzik brings up an interesting perspective as we close this part of chapter 63 with another look at verse 4 which states, "It was for me the day of vengeance; the year for me to redeem had come." In this verse, Isaiah prophetically explains why Messiah can say, "Vengeance is in My heart." It isn't because God loves punishing sinners, but He does love vindicating His **redeemed**.

Notice also this last comparison: Each phrase is simply a poetic way of saying "time" but God fittingly uses the picture of a day in communicating His **vengeance**, and a year in expressing His grace."

I would like to leave you with one last thought about God's grace - Jesus wore a crown of thorns so that each of us could wear a crown of righteousness.