

**Isaiah 61:1-3 “Oaks of Righteousness” December 16-18, 2017**  
**Pastor Don Sutton - St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN**

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**Isaiah 61:1-3**

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 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 and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup> 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.

**Introduction**

*(Picture of an oak tree)* This is a tree. But it’s not just any tree. It’s an oak tree that sits on the lot line between Leora John’s farm and that of Larry and Helen Black. It’s a WELS oak tree. The oak tree is a common symbol of strength and endurance. Did you know that it is the national tree of the United States?

In Isaiah 61:1-3 God uses the oak tree to picture what he can do with people. The end result of God’s working in their lives is that they will be called, **“OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.”** Today we think about what God has to say about this.

**“Who’s Preaching?”**

“Who’s preaching?” I hear people sometimes ask this as they walk into church and haven’t yet gotten their bulletin. “Who’s preaching?” is a question one might ask in respect to words of Isaiah 61, *“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (1b).”* In answer some say it is Isaiah or the Old Testament prophets. In Luke 4 Jesus read these verses in the synagogue in Nazareth and said that he was the fulfillment of them. Jesus is the one who is anointed or blessed to be both the Savior, and the one who would preach good news to the poor. As the Apostle Peter told a Roman soldier named Cornelius, **“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts. 10:38).”** In ancient times anointing showed honor and bestowed authority.

**Initial Audience**

While Jesus is the speaker, Isaiah is the writer. Isaiah prophecies in the late 700’s and early 600’s B.C. But the initial and partial fulfillment of these words would come over 100 years later. It was a time when the people of Judah had been invaded by the Babylonians several times. Some people had been taken 1000 miles away to Babylon. People had lost homes, family, livelihood. There was devastation all around. And within there was guilt. People had turned their backs on God and now they were suffering the consequences. They had no hope to change anything on their own. They were poor, brokenhearted, captive, and in mourning – spiritually, emotionally, and physically. (See 2 Kgs. 25:8-12)

**Can You Relate?**

Even though centuries removed from these Old Testament people can you relate to their situation? Caught up in some sin have you found yourself feeling worthless, heartbroken that you offended God, captive to your sinful nature, under the sentence of God’s condemnation, mourning over your sinful stupidity, guilt? Not only does the sin we commit leave us poor, brokenhearted, captive, and in mourning, but also things that happen around us and to us. We may work hard to achieve things, but someone else gets the credit. Or circumstances don’t go our way and our best efforts still end up in the worst of failures. Or we get old and are so limited in what we can do. We may feel poor, worthless, and depressed. People may fail us or forsake us, even turn against us, and we feel brokenhearted. Sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances we don’t control and we may feel captive. Then there is always death that’s awaiting us at the end of life and we can’t get away from it. Speaking of death, we

lose loved ones and we mourn. We lose things and we mourn. We lose opportunities and we mourn. We too find ourselves poor, brokenhearted, captive, and in mourning.

### ***Deliverance for Judah***

In Isaiah 61 the Servant of the Lord promises deliverance. His mission – **“1) to proclaim good news to the poor... 2) to bind up the brokenhearted ... 3) to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ... 4) to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God ... 5) to comfort all who mourn provide for those who grieve in Zion ... 6) 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.”**

For those who experienced the Babylonian invasions, destruction, death, and/or captivity, these words would speak to them of forgiveness, comfort, strength, release from captivity, return from exile, restoration of life and places. God would restore their relationship with him and rebuild their hope of a heavenly future. He would honor them as is children and bless them as his people.

The “year of the Lord’s favor” was the Year of Jubilee described in Leviticus 25 – every 50th year. In that year property sold reverted to the original owner, debts were forgiven, and people in slavery because of debt, were freed. I was a foreshadowing of how the Savior would come to bring the forgiveness of sins, freedom from sin’s curse and dominance, and freedom from the dominance of death.

The “day of the Lord’s vengeance” in the short-term referred to God’s vengeance on those who mistreated or took advantage of his people when they were vulnerable. As we know from the rest of Isaiah the nations who did so were numerous. But ultimately, that would be the Judgment Day when Jesus returns and as Lord of Lords and King of Kings (Revelation 19), defeats and eternally damns all his enemies.

### ***Deliverance for Us***

While these verses find short-term fulfillment in a return from exile and restoration for the people of Judah, the real fulfillment is in the coming of Jesus as our Savior, what he would do, and the results he would bring.

Jesus, the sinless Son of God came to be for us what we couldn’t be for God. Because of our sin and many sins we have no worthiness before God. We couldn’t say to God, “Father, look at how holy I am!” Because we are not. But Jesus was. He’s “the Lord our Righteousness.” In our baptism and through our faith we wear that holiness that God wants and that worthiness that we need to be acceptable to our Father.

Jesus, God’s servant and our Savior came to give us healing and hope. Without Jesus we only have death, the grave, and hell to which we can look forward. Without Jesus, we’re left to fend for ourselves and overcome challenges bigger than our capability to do so. Without Jesus we’re left hopeless, helpless, and brokenhearted. But with Jesus we know that God loves us. Jesus is proof. Eternal life is ours. He is with us to help us through the tough times. He gives us hope and healing.

With his suffering and death on the cross Jesus has freed us from the curse of sin we deserve. With the life he gives and love he has put into our hearts, he has freed us from captivity to sin. Every day we fight a battle with the devil and our sinful nature, but standing in faith on God’s word and love, we can say no to Satan and practice self-control. We have been freed from hopelessness and helplessness.

With Jesus, every day is a Day of the Lord’s Favor – debts forgiveness, having God’s love, and living his life.

Jesus comforts us in our mourning. When we grieve over our sins, he says in the gospel, “Your sins are forgiven.” When we grieve when things don’t go our way, “He reminds us that he will work all things for our good. When grieve the loss of a loved one or are suddenly afraid of dying, he says, “Whoever believes in me will never perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).”

Jesus has bestowed on us a crown of beauty as he has made us part of God's royal priesthood of believers. He has anointed us with the oil of joy as he has given us joy in our being saved and through his Holy Spirit who in turn gives us joy. He has given us a garment of praise in that every day we have reason to praise the Lord.

God has declared us to be - "**oaks of righteousness**" – holy and pleasing in his sight through Jesus our Savior. The righteousness we did not have on our own, Jesus has given to us through faith.

But the "Oaks of Righteousness" Jesus declared us to be, he helps us more and more to become. As the apostle Paul wrote, *"I can do all things through him who gives me strength."* Through the message of Jesus the Holy Spirit grows us from immature trees to strong and sturdy trees - oaks of righteousness. In response to this righteousness we have been declared to have and have received through faith in Jesus, we then produce fruits of righteousness and lumber of righteousness – good works - for the display of God's splendor, that is to the glory of God.

Display God's splendor this Christmas in how you deal with people. Display his splendor in the patience and kindness you show people. Display God's splendor as you meet with family, in-laws, and outlaws. Show them love. As challenges come your way, rather than falling apart or holding a pity party, display God's splendor by putting you trust in the Lord and patiently waiting his deliverance. Be the Oaks of Righteous God has made you be. Amen. (DRS)