

Week 10

Isaiah 61:1-11 "The Great Reversal"

Begin with prayer

Good and gracious God,

Thank you for this semester and for the opportunity to gather together for this Bible study. Thank you for the opportunity to spend time in your scripture and in fellowship with you people. As this semester comes to a close, we ask that the promise of the gospel will fill our hearts. May we be transformed by it. We also pray that one day all things and all people may be reconciled to you. May we share the good news of your love with everyone we encounter.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Read the text for today. (Suggestion: Go around and read it out loud, each person taking a verse.)

Ask: What stood out to you about this text? What, if anything, doesn't make sense? What caught your attention and sparked curiosity?

Few passages are as full of imagery as is Isaiah 61. These words serve as a sign of new hope and beginnings. This passage is full of fresh joy that delivers more gospel cargo than some long and well worded sermons. Many of these words cause nostalgia because we know they formed the basis of Jesus' first sermon as recorded in Luke 4.

Isaiah points to what so many people long for every single day of their lives: the great reversal. The poor whose lives have for so long been filled with nothing but bad news receive the gift of good news. Those long held captive in dungeons and prisons receive their promised freedom. Those who for years have spent many days dampening handkerchiefs with their tears, receive comfort and are pointed toward a day of smiles and laughter. Ashes get blown away to make way for glittering crowns. The drab clothing of mourning gets replaced with festive and colorful garments fit for a great party. People who for too long have felt like dead sticks, are promised that they will soon stand as tall and sturdy as the grandest oak tree.

This is Nelson Mandela emerging from his jail cell after so many years of unjust incarceration and walking out into the sunlight of a new day dawning. This is the rollback of injustice and of oppression as the once-imprisoned man takes the oath of office as president of the very nation that had locked him away for 27 long years. And this hope is not only for international heroes like Mandela. It is also for college students-college students who wondered how they would ever pay for their education who are now walking across the graduation stage, diploma in hand. This is Psalm 122 when people arrive at a new day and find their mouths filled with giggles they could not suppress even if they tried (and they have no desire to try!). People long for such reversals. Scratch the surface of anyone's life and you'll find just below that outwardly calm-looking surface, is a world of hurts able to bring most anyone to tears.

We are right to long and yearn for the great reversal of all things. We are also right to locate the source of where this goodness and shalom will come from: from the Triune God, who alone has the power and the supreme knowledge to make it happen! As Christians, we know the way that God would accomplish all this planting and sprouting of righteousness was through the incarnation of God's only Son, Jesus Christ. We know that Isaiah 61's great reversals are the work of God Almighty, not the result of human work. We know that it had to be this way, because the way salvation comes is only something God could do.

This text speaks hope to the person who wishes their life had turned out more exciting, more fulfilling than it did. This text speaks hope to the person whose marriage was never all it was cracked up to be. This text speaks hope to the adult child who has forever been disappointed in mom and dad. This text speaks hope to those whose bank accounts are full and whose hearts are empty, as well as to those whose hearts are full but who scratch out a poor existence. This text speaks hope to the lonely who never could find the love of their lives, and to the minorities who were made to feel inferior by others. Isaiah's prophetic words point to a time (and to a person) when God's kingdom will manifest itself fully.

Let's talk about it!

There is a poem written by a 12-year-old girl Korean girl who was raised in a slum. It is just one girl's words and yet, as Douglas John Hall has noted, these words could fit equally well on the lips of too many people:

My mother's name is Worry.
In summer, my mother worries about water;
In winter, about coal briquettes.
And all year long she worries about rice.
In daytime, my mother worries about living;
At night, she worries for children;
And all day long she worries and worries.
My mother's name is Worry.
My father's name is Drunken Frenzy.
And my name . . . my name is Tear and Sigh.

Someday, as Isaiah tells us and as Jesus later confirmed, for all who live this way there will be good news, there will be comfort, there will be an end to the worries that an unjust and fallen world bring to too many people. Some day . . . some day. But for this day, we can point to The One who has already come into this world and who is coming again to make all things new.

Let's talk about it:

- If you were to write a poem, what images or words would it include?
- What things are you most excited about being affected by "The Great Reversal"?
- Read Luke 4:16-21. What does Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 teach us about his identity and mission? Does it matter that Jesus left out "and the day of vengeance of our God"? What does that imply about the difference between his first and second comings?
- This is the final study! What are you taking away from this time together?