



ISAIAH Session 5/5
Isaiah chapter 61
The year of God's favour

To begin

Share your experiences with one another of how the teaching from last week has shaped your thoughts & actions in the past week.

Opening prayer

- You might want to light a candle and then open this time together with the prayer below, or use your own.

God of all comfort,
where we are stuck, release us,
where we have given up hope, inspire us.
Where we focus only on ourselves,
help us to see the needs of others;
transform us by your Spirit to be the people you have called us to be,
spreading your love and proclaiming your presence throughout the world.
We ask this through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Hearing and understanding God's word

- **Ask someone in the group to read, or share the reading of Isaiah chapter 61**

Chapter 61 rings with joy because of a great promise that God has given to the prophet. God has commissioned him to proclaim a message of comfort. He is to announce to the nation of Israel that God will save them from their adversity and change their mourning into rejoicing. He refers to this coming salvation as 'the year of God's favour and the day of his vengeance' (v2). The phrase 'day of his vengeance' means God taking action against Israel's enemies.

In verses 4 to 9 the prophet heaps image upon image as he encourages the people. He describes the glorious future awaiting them. The ruined foreign nations will serve the people of Israel and honour them since they will recognize that God has chosen this nation to be their priest. Instead of shame, Israel will receive honour. God will bless the people of Israel so much that the nations will recognise their unique status, so fulfilling his promises given to Abraham that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. According to verses 7 & 8, God will save the Israelites because his righteousness is offended by the way the nations have oppressed them. The chapter ends as the prophet rejoices in the national salvation the Lord will bring.

Luke's gospel, chapter 4.16-21, tells of Jesus reading this passage in a synagogue and applying it to himself. He, like the prophet, had been sent to proclaim the good news to the afflicted and the oppressed. What is more, Jesus believed that the year of God's favour had now arrived; it had come in the 'kingdom of God' which he was bringing into the world.

As Christians, we have a message for the afflicted and the oppressed, to be proclaimed both in our words and in our deeds.

We began this series by speaking of a tale of two cities. The city of Babylon is a symbol of self-centred living that brings misery and disharmony. In this passage we have a picture of the new Jerusalem being restored to health and well-being for all (shalom), God's dream for communities.

Word and Spirit

In this study of Isaiah you are invited to let the Holy Spirit be your teacher, asking the Spirit to

1. highlight the scriptures
2. show you what you need to do
3. give you his strength to fulfil what he shows you

- **Reread Isaiah 61 ready to answer the following questions**

- Is there a phrase or a sentence that especially speaks to you? You may like to share it with the group and if you can say why you like it.
- How can we be a part of bringing in God's kingdom of shalom where we live and work?
- How do you think God wants to use you to bring healing and wholeness?
- In what ways do you think we as a church are being called to be restorers of what is broken?

Praying and acting on God's word

Recap

As this is the final session in this series, spend some time looking back together over the previous weeks. This is a great opportunity to pray, review and agree actions incorporating the learning from the whole series.

Spend some time in silence or out loud bringing to God in prayer some of the things you have just been talking about.

Listen out for hearing and enjoying more of Isaiah during the Christmas season.

You might want to say together the prayer you began with and then blow the candle out to end the session.