

Isaiah 61

Isaiah 61 is a prophetic declaration which is extensive and critical to our understanding of biblical healing and preparation of the people of God. It describes how the Lord will turn breakdown into restoration. Therefore, it is a chapter to look at closely as we address the formidable work of restoring His children to completeness in Him.

*Is. 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound,*

Verse 1 declares the coming of Jesus and what He is anointed to do. When Jesus read this passage in the synagogue, He said:

Lk. 4:21 ... "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The *order* of what He was sent to accomplish is as significant as the heart condition He identified. The first priority is to preach the good news to the poor, that is, the meek and the

humble, either in attitude or circumstance or both. Wilson defines “poor” as the “oppressed, afflicted, wretched, but everywhere with the accessory idea of humility.” It’s a compelling statement: *bearing* the good news calls for humility, being aware of, accepting our broken and afflicted state, and realizing our need for a Savior. The pride of man is the first hurdle. Then we have to *know* God comes to save, and that he is able to do so. The good news is the security we need to humble ourselves and move through the healing that follows.

The second priority is healing the brokenhearted: "He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted." Brokenhearted leads naturally to captivity, in this Scripture and in life. The prisons were not and are not physical prisons. They are made up of what we believe in our hearts, embrace as true, and so act upon. That is the sort of prison identified in Matthew 6:22 and 23:

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Remember the knowing the serpent offered in Genesis 3, knowing by sight and experience, by what we take in through our own faculties. What we see and judge about it becomes our light and truth. If we embrace darkness as though it is light, how great is that darkness! That is the sort of prison we are trapped in—believing things to be true that do not agree with the light of God. And when we believe something is true, we do not call it into question. God will have to make a way to expose the lie. Enabling us to *see* that what we are embracing as light is actually darkness is a daunting work and not always welcome information. Sometimes we defend and prove our perceptions, discredit those who question them, and even break off contact rather than examine more closely what we have come to believe. There is a one sentence summary of this principle in Isaiah 44. In that chapter Isaiah identified the idols that the children of God were looking to instead of the Lord, and how spiritually empty and without nourishment those counterfeits were. His summary of their heart condition is:

Is. 44:20 He feeds on ashes;

A deceived heart has turned him aside;

And he cannot deliver his soul,

Nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Figuratively, "right hand" refers to our strongest side. To pronounce what we have our weight resting on to be a lie is an overwhelming challenge, however freeing it may be once accomplished. Consequently, we remain trapped in untruths for a long time, confused and frustrated in trying to get them to work. These are the prisons implied in this passage, and they are indeed formidable. In chapter 44 Isaiah cites the snares; in chapter 61 he proclaims *how* God intends to rescue us from them.

61:2,3 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,

And the day of vengeance of our God;

To comfort all who mourn,

To console those who mourn in Zion,

To give them beauty for ashes,

The oil of joy for mourning,

The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;

That they may be called trees of righteousness,

The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified

The last phrase in Isaiah 61:2 identifies the *form* of healing the Lord uses. It is essentially an exchange program: "To comfort all who mourn." We bring the things we have to mourn; He brings the kind of comfort that can heal and replace whatever destruction occurred. The word "comfort" means sympathy which leads to acts of comforting and strengthening another; it also carries the element of revenge—the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, it says. God will comfort and restore our hearts, and He will repay wrongs. We sometimes struggle with the time frame for justice to occur, the delay involved in wrongs being made right, and we may be unwilling to settle for comfort *unless* things *are* made right (Asaph said: "my soul refused to be comforted"). Sometimes people are too angry to settle for comfort and redemption. The demand of our hearts may be for revenge and justice. The Lord intends both; He comforts, revives, and restores the hearts of his children, and He will deal with the party responsible for destruction. In this same chapter, verse 8 begins with: "For I, the Lord, love justice," and He is perhaps the only One who knows what it is.

I remember a time when I was extremely angry at someone (with cause). The Lord did not disagree about the offense. In fact, I felt He was not happy with what happened either. It was

comforting to hear that. However, then He asked me, "What shall we do with him?" I instantly realized that there was no way I could accurately weigh the person's life, or the ways and causes by which attitudes had formed, or be in any position to pronounce justice. It humbled me profoundly; I could feel myself letting go of the offense, *preferring* to leave it to the Lord, realizing how many offenses I had committed calling for forgiveness.

In five words, "to comfort all who mourn," the Lord speaks volumes about healing. "All who mourn" sounds like there are those who don't. This seems to be true. Many people do not get through their protections down to what they have to mourn. And receiving comfort is not as easy as it sounds. It is an extremely vulnerable position to be in and there are many people who, having no experience of comfort in life, find it extremely difficult to relate to it. They don't have experience of comfort, and cannot perceive the power it has to restore.

The *New Testament* word for comfort is *parakaleo*, which is a combination of *para*, close alongside, and *kaleo*, to call—one called close alongside, who consoles, speaks tenderly to, and ministers healing. Notice how close *parakaleo* is to the word *Paraclete*, the word used for the Holy Spirit—the Comforter. I often speak of comfort as an extremely powerful means of healing. I say that because of something I have noticed: people do not get okay if their pain goes unnoticed; if what happened to them didn't matter; if they were blamed for being too sensitive; if it was no big deal, or if the popular, though nearly impossible directive, "just get over it" is the means offered for "healing." Healing calls for someone who doesn't minimize the cost, consoles appropriately, and reflects how much it matters to the One who comes to heal and save. When the reality that it occurred and the very real destruction it caused are acknowledged and comforted accurately, we can begin to let go of the devastating effects, *in exchange* for being valued and heard and cared about.

Is. 61:3 To console those who mourn in Zion,

To give them beauty for ashes,

The oil of joy for mourning,

The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness....

Verse 3 describes the Lord's exchanges, the way He goes about healing our broken hearts—He exchanges life-giving elements for the destruction our hearts have endured. I see verse 3 as the pivotal point in this chapter. Everything that follows verse 3 depends on verse 3 happening, actually *happening* in our heart. It is not enough to *know* the verse says these things and value the beautiful sentiment it expresses. ***The activity of mourning and letting God comfort us has to occur.*** It is by *receiving* His comfort, His concern for our brokenness, and His perspective on our value, that

the most painful part of the prison loosens and begins to open again to life.

These exchanges are equally powerful whether we are exchanging destruction that has been done *to* us, or bringing forms of destruction *we* have caused others. Sin essentially means missing God. There are many ways by which we can miss God. The most subtle and effective means involve being deceived into believing something the Lord does not agree with and acting as though it were true. We believe what we have heard about ourselves or Him, we embrace faulty life priorities, we believe our own rationalizations and explain things away to abate pain. But whether healing is from wrongs done to us or from wrongs we have done, the Lord's purpose is to restore us. He is content for us to see, hear, confess, learn, grieve our blindness and theirs, and let Him restore. He considers such exchanges “just.”

*1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and **just** to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Isaiah also identifies the reason the Lord performs these exchanges: *“That they (we) may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”* It is not by our own doing that we are saved, and it is not our glowing performance that moves the Lord to come deliver us from the prisons we have devised or that were constructed for us. Because it is a work only He can do, His glory is manifest in it. God is revealed and exalted as He works restoration, and it is evident even to those who would prefer to explain it some other way. If we acknowledge the hand of God, we must come to terms with his love and authority. I remember the initial challenge I felt over the kind of change and transformation I knew would alter my life dramatically, and forever!

The focus spoken of prophetically in Isaiah 61 is related to what it says in Matthew 5:4, *“Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted.”* There is great healing in being comforted, especially by the Lord, but notice that mourning and comfort **must go together** for blessedness to occur.

The Key is Mourning

How is it I call something we attempt to avoid an important key to healing? Well, think about it: If the key were one we could easily relate to and see, wouldn't we all be healed and restored to full partnership with the Lord already? So, it must be something we don't see clearly enough to embrace, or that we naturally resist. The key is something we have learned to avoid, to find a way

around. For example, everyone who comes to see me (and those who don't) have things to mourn, just by virtue of being a person living in the world. Most people have not mourned their losses, and most have not been comforted back to life and joy. Yet, they often tell me that they have "worked through" things, and do not understand what is preventing closeness with the Lord. When we investigate how they have "worked through," I discover their means are bereft of mourning or comfort:

- It was a long time ago, and I've moved on.
- I can understand now why they were so abusive. They had a terrible childhood, too.
- I know that a lot of people have it worse than I do.
- I know that I have to let the past be the past.
- I should be on the other side of all of this, but something is holding me back.
- I feel so selfish in working on these things for so long.
- Maybe I'm just a loser and haven't faced it.
- Maybe I'm not someone that the Lord chooses to talk to, etc.

You can hear the wrestling in all of these, and how they have tried to work with what they "know" to find a solution. Those means avoid the pain in their heart. They are ways devised "chiefly-in-the-mind." There is not much mourning or comfort in these efforts, but there *is* genuine struggle, and a certain amount of depression has generally attended their efforts. Depression occurs because our efforts don't work. Trying over and over to get something that doesn't work to work is depressing. The problem is that the feelings that always needed comforting have been hidden away in the heart and the person is no longer in touch with them. When I begin to mention the emotional repercussions of their history, they either look at me blankly, or their eyes fill with tears. Disconnected emotions are there, but they are rarely accessed.

Burying pain produces some relief from the immediate and impossible intensity which we cannot stay in and continue to function. However, feelings are not buried without influence. They hold broken trust, disillusionment, suspicion, doubts that we are loved, and cause us to resort to internal aloneness for safety. It is a matter of helping people move through their form of "working through" to the territory underneath where the Lord wants to join them. He sees, wants to hear the deep grief that is there, bring His comfort to replace the way they have been managing or compensating, put them back together and free them to be. The ***Prepared Heart Illustration*** (end of ***Chapter 9***) takes on more meaning in light of this discussion.

There is an implicit dilemma in taking the Lord up on His offer and provision for healing. We have to get through enough of the heart debris to "see" the Lord, be aware of his presence, and experience the gentleness and depth of his love, which are the keys to healing. But without

gentleness, love, patience, and acceptance already in place we cannot tolerate getting near the things we have to mourn. It's a formidable dilemma and explains the nature of the struggle people experience. These are some of the realities that attend mourning. Not knowing how to go there leaves us at a distinct disadvantage in receiving the healing He came to offer!

This pivotal point of mourning is one of the places where Scripture declares a way of life so different from the way we have gone about it that we wonder if it really is the Lord advocating such a course of action. Let me give you an example. I was speaking to a young woman and taking some notes on her history as she was relating it to me. In response to one of my questions, "What has been your experience of the Lord," she reported a time when she was in worship and prayer, and felt that the Lord spoke to her. She was very reluctant to say what she heard because she felt it couldn't be true, and so couldn't be Him. What she heard was: "Don't be so hard on yourself." She discounted it because she felt her behavior warranted being hard on her, and concluded it couldn't be God. Therefore, the conversation ended. Later, in reading back over my notes, I asked the Lord what He wanted to do with that. Not surprisingly, He wanted to continue the conversation he had initiated with her, and use me to hold that approach in place. The directive He gave—"Don't be so hard on yourself"—was a gracious wedge to part the debris and point to places in her heart more in need of comfort than condemnation.

In the second meeting I focused on that word of the Lord. We discussed the way in which what he said *matches* the gospel, reflects His compassion, and His much more expansive sight. Then we began to pray about continuing the conversation. Her honest heart response to his directive was: "Why would You say that? It feels to me like I'm not hard enough on myself because I'm still doing things I know I shouldn't be." I encouraged her to go ahead and ask that question. Then we took some time to let Him respond to her honesty. After a while she looked up at me and said something like: He is showing me my heart. He sees my heart and why things happen the way they do. She could feel His understanding and acceptance (which caused the well of tears to overflow). She sensed Him offering what she really needed, though comfort was a foreign experience for her. She was quite amazed at the Lord's perspective and response, but had to admit that it was more true and complete than hers.

At that point, she was not yet mourning the things she had to mourn in her life, but she had the kind of experience with Him she needed in order to consider mourning a better option than condemnation. She got a significant glimpse of the provision the Lord is for our mourning. I suspect a number of the people reading this book can relate to her experience and the difficulty we have getting down to the territory we have to mourn.

What happens when we do break through to the things we have to mourn and can let the Lord comfort us? When we are aware of the Lord's presence, His passionate desire to be in it with

us becomes evident, His compassion and tenderness impart safety, and we discover a place where our hearts can settle and be at peace. His response breathes in the value He pronounces over His children, the depth of His love, His willingness to invest in whatever is needed to bring healing, and it speaks of clear ownership—we are His children, the ones He never forgets and comes to deliver. Of course, we “know” these things, but when they come alive relationally with him, we move from one who “knows about” to one who is being transformed within.

Here's an interesting aside to illustrate the Lord's heart toward His children. In Scripture the Lord and His ways are compared to an eagle. Here is what Wilson says of the eagle:

It's wings are very large and strong; its flight exceeding swift and lofty; it's sight very penetrating and extensive. It is said to be very affectionate to its young, assisting and supporting their flight, when they first leave their nests, with its own wings.

Powerful and tender! That is the combination we need.

Ex. 19:4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.'

The combination of power to save and tenderness to relate to our wounding is what we need. We may have grown accustomed to managing without comfort, but the Lord does not settle for that or call it resolution. And of course He is right. When we can get through to His means, even the things we have been too afraid to let surface become bearable. We seem to have to know that there is a way through the pain before we can consider wading into it. Not only a way through it, but also that there is something better on the other side, some exchange that makes going there worthwhile.

There is no way to let the Lord minister to us that deeply and not “see” His heart, the depth of His love and compassion. We will know Him better, see Him as He truly is.

Jer. 31:4 Again I will rebuild you, and you shall be rebuilt,

O virgin of Israel!

*You shall again be adorned with your tambourines,
And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.*

*Ps. 30:11,12 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,
To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.*

These Scriptures express the Lord's promise and what He intends toward his children, as well as the grateful response of one who experiences His comfort and so realizes what is on the other side of mourning.

Yet another outcome is that if our heart has been judgmental toward others in their struggle or toward ourselves in ours, the Lord's perspective, approach, and much more extensive understanding works to soften our heart. After a few such encounters with the Lord, people often say something about how many others they know who need this kind of encounter with the Lord, and they have a sense of sadness that people do not know about it. This is a sign of beginning to share His compassion and take on a kinder, more loving and forgiving attitude. In the face of the Lord's truth, our own conclusions seem puny, untrue, shabby things to cling to, so of course we begin to let go of them. Even though we wrestle with the huge contrast between the Lord's perspective and our own, He works to loosen and overrule the "truths" we have come to by relying on our own faculties. You can hear people wrestling with these truths. It sounds something like:

Is that really the Lord?

How is that possible?

Does He really see me that way?

It seems too good to be true.

How come I have been a Christian for 20 years, and haven't experienced this?

The answer to the last question is both extremely complicated, and quite simple: we don't know how to get down to mourning and our need for comfort. We are more trained up in overcoming, using our own resources. Overcoming and healing are not at all the same: we overcome the enemy by believing the Lord, we overcome doubt by faith, we overcome weariness with perseverance, but we do not overcome the pain and brokenness in our hearts—they call for healing. We can run from them, compensate for them in a variety of ways, but the need for comfort and healing will not go away.

Well, *what* do we have to mourn? The list is longer than we'd like to think. There are our own shortcomings and the cost of them. There are the wounding blows that have fallen, whether physical or verbal, and the humiliating or defiling messages that have diminished our view of ourselves and perhaps misrepresented God in our sight. There is the gradual discovery of all the ways in which we have missed the Lord and bouts of mourning and repentance as we face our sin. The sorrow over missing the Lord is magnified as we have more experience of the depth of His love. We are created by and obligated to the ruler of the universe, but we have gone about our lives as though it is our own sovereignty that counts, often not realizing the cost of exercising it. I remember when I returned to the Lord in my early 30's. The previous years of walking away from him and the grief I felt called for numerous encounters in which I poured out my grief. He comforted me into new understandings, but I struggled for a time to let His forgiveness and restoring of sight be a sufficient outcome.

His exchanges and the power comfort has to restore us are the means by which Paul underwent many tribulations on his journey with the Lord, and was not derailed or defeated by them. Instead he was more powerfully equipped to minister to those undergoing related difficulties.

2 Cor. 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation (comfort) also abounds through Christ

God Appoints Us

There is a word used in Isaiah 61:3 that we need to look at more closely. The NKJV reads, "To console those who mourn in Zion." The KJV translates it, "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion." Wilson, in defining the Hebrew word console or appoint says that it means to set, place, put, in any manner; to ordain, establish; to appoint; to place or appoint over anything.

Is. 61:3 To console (appoint) those who mourn in Zion,

To give them beauty for ashes,

The oil of joy for mourning,

The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;

That they may be called trees of righteousness,

The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.

Consider a couple of things in this regard: First, the Lord appoints us to healing exchanges, and later it says that those who have moved through these healing exchanges with Him will be those He appoints to turn things around for others—restore the desolations of many generations (Is. 61:4). Second, what happens if we *don't* move through these healing exchanges? We remain hurt, angry, are easily offended by similar events, react more intensely than the situation warrants, and compensate for the pain in some relatively destructive way. The implication emerging is that freeing from brokenness is an important criterion for appointing one to the things of God.

Those who allow the Lord to comfort and heal and restore them are those He will appoint over things. This proclaims a different credentialing process than we currently follow; it probably points to the primary weakness of our credentialing process. Our process is largely academic. People get a degree and are appointed largely on the strength of the degree. What we see and have seen for many years is that the fall of leaders, and the failures in the witness of believers stem from unmourned, uncomforted, unhealed conditions that produce compensating or destructive behaviors and the wounding of others that is their fruit. No wonder the Lord's credentialing is healing of hearts, preparing us for His work of healing hearts and restoring His children to Himself.

Is that really a fair interpretation of what is being said in this passage, hanging it on just one word, appoint? One doesn't have to hang it on one word, though its meaning is clear and compelling. The statement in the verse that follows is very explicit. It says plainly that those who have gone through this healing with the Lord are the ones appointed to the work of restoration. Basically verse 4 says, **THEY**, the ones who have made those exchanges, they will be the ones to do the rebuilding.

Is 61:4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins,

They shall raise up the former desolations,

And they shall repair the ruined cities,

The desolations of many generations.

It is reinforced again in verse 6, where it says that “they” will be named the priests of the Lord, and the servants of our God.

Is. 61:6 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord,

They shall call you the servants of our God....

The people who are beat up and have thought of themselves as disqualified are the ones on whom He bestows beauty for ashes, and who will be raised up and raise up others. When you think about it, this is the way it has to work, if it is going to work at all, because indeed everyone *is* brokenhearted and imprisoned to some degree. There are degrees of brokenness, but there is no one who isn't broken at all. It is a statement of how thorough a transformation the Lord intends to work, and the outcome of that kind of transformation. He's going to appoint those who mourn, not because they are broken, but because of what happens to them with Him in the mourning process—all they learn and come to see, and the compassion they experience. A sensitive wisdom is forged during that healing process with the Lord, along with the strength and patience and willingness to sustain them in the process of seeing others through it. It's very different than the way we would choose to go about it, but it is ingenious, thorough, and works powerfully! That is, *IF* we will actually move through the exchanges with Him.

Beauty for Ashes

And what are the exchanges? The essential nature of them is comfort for mourning, but characteristic of Hebrew poetry, the initial statement is repeated with slight changes and a growing impact and breadth of meaning. That is what happens as we start into “beauty for ashes.” Ashes

are a double metaphor. It is a way that mourning was expressed in the Middle East—sackcloth and ashes to express the intense feelings of loss and mourning. Ashes are also the product of things being burned up and destroyed. It is beautifully poetic and encouraging in its promise, but it holds a challenge similar to that involved in mourning. A formidable honesty is called for to pronounce something in our life ashes. It's an extremely painful pronouncement; we generally try to salvage things, not wanting to call them ashes. When there is no way to salvage, the loss being manifest and inescapable, we may be plunged into feelings of failure and discouragement, thinking that there is nowhere to go, life is over, or pointless. But what happens if we get the ashes over to the Lord? What does He do with them?

If we feel like a failure because something has not worked, or has been crushing enough to cause us to give up, then we have bumped into a source of value that is bound to let us down—our performance, ability, or success. They are fine while they work, but an intense disaster when we can no longer accomplish a sense of value by those means. The Lord never agrees that *we* are a failure because our performance has failed. An encounter with Him challenges that value structure and offers a much more complete one. He loves His children whether we succeed or fail, and is committed to comforting and putting us back together no matter what has happened, even if it is *entirely* our own doing. This kind of encounter with the Lord restores hope, but reveals that even when we thought our success was working, it was a prison that kept us from seeing how much we needed this place with the Lord. We start to feel *really* valued and discover that though we may be extremely unhappy with ourselves, the Lord is not unhappy with us. He may agree with the loss, even help us count it honestly, and not argue with our part in it, when that is the case, but He loves US in any case, and that revives the heart. To Him our hearts are beautiful, a truth He is glad to exchange for our ashes.

If the ashes are due to something or someone being lost and there is anger at the Lord for letting it happen, it calls for the same honesty with Him. We are angry with Him and unwilling to let someone we are angry with help us or contribute anything other than changing what happened. We will have to continue with Him, come to terms with the world being riddled with harmful, evil possibilities and the reality that we are as subject to them as our fellowman. The question becomes will we accept redemption for even the worst losses. Redemption in some form is always possible, changing what happened is not. The Lord will be with us in the pain and bring many understandings and a new heart out of it, if we can settle for redemption. It is humbling, but we stand to realize that we can sustain any loss more than we can afford to lose *Him*. Unless we will exchange our perspective on things, how they should be, and our anger at the Lord for not making them that way, we will not be able to receive the redemption that may be the only life-giving option left. He can turn ashes to beauty, but the way He accomplishes it may be surprising to us. Often everything depends on our ability to relent from our conditions and demands about how things *should* be and receive what we need for the situation we find ourselves in now. From the Lord's point of view that kind of humbling opens the door to receiving our inheritance; from our point of view that kind of humbling may at first seem an outrage to be avoided at all cost, in which case the prison will stand strong.

Here is a personal example of this kind of encounter with the Lord. I was extremely angry at Him for what was happening, and how unfair I found it to be. There was no way out of it, and seemingly no very good way through it either. I said: “Lord, I am so angry at You that I don’t even want to talk to You, **let alone receive anything from You**, but I have to admit that I need Your help. I see that I can’t get through this myself.” Out of the exchange that followed came a place that I would not trade for anything in the world—the certainty that my value and purpose and direction are based on the Lord and what He has said to me, and I can rest there no matter what anyone else says or does, however unfair or untrue it may be. Moreover, that place is available to me even when the accusations are true! He then *justly* convicts me, forgives and instructs me, restores and strengthens me.

The Oil of Joy for Mourning

Is. 61:3 “...the oil of joy for mourning...”

For joy to be restored our understanding has to be supplemented with hope in a larger truth. It is the place with the Lord—the place itself—that restores joy. Being *with* Him, wrapped in His love, with His comfort soaking in restores hope and produces a joy in Him. I will give you an example of this. I was ministering to a young woman who had more wounding and devastation in her life than any five people should have and be able to survive. And the result of it was that her heart was SO sealed off that the possibility of getting through to a point of connection with the Lord seemed rather unlikely. Furthermore, she had attempted to hear from Him and receive from Him *many* times and her experience was that nothing happened, so one does not want to help repeat that experience. Her anxiety level was extreme, and her hope depleted. So she and I were both stumped. I said in my heart: “Lord, what do You want to do here?” While I was listening to her, I also heard that the Lord wanted me to help her lay aside all *her* efforts. Instead we would ask *Him* to show her something about His presence that she could relate to and by which she could have some idea of His response to her.

Still, in my heart I said: “Lord, she has been disappointed so many times....” I was wrestling around with that a bit, when He said: “Go ahead, child.” So I suggested exactly what He said, went over and placed my hand on her shoulder and began to pray that the Lord would show her about His presence and respond to her in ***some way that she could relate to and tolerate***. I prayed that for a while, then there was a time of silence, and after a while I asked her how she was doing. She said: “I feel light and peaceful.” She didn’t “see” or hear anything from Him; she just found herself enveloped in peace. I said: “Is that something you can accomplish yourself?” She said “NO” in a very animated way, laughed good-naturedly and got it! Her whole demeanor was

lighter, and her eyes brightened. There was a sense of joy and encouragement—maybe something COULD happen because it did! He did what He says He wants to do: “My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). For someone who has been eaten up with anxiety most of her life, there is no more precious gift! And there was no need to address the fear or trust barriers that would have been hugely preventive if they had to be a factor. I have no idea how the Lord does such things, but somehow He caused His peace to settle upon her and she could not miss it. The deadlock was broken—in a very gentle, reviving way that she could tolerate and welcome!

The Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness

Is. 6:3 ... “The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...”

Heaviness is a very descriptive word for the condition identified next. Strong’s says it means feeble, obscure, dark; to be weak, despondent. Wilson says it means blunted; applied to faintness of the spirit, when the vigour of the mind is dulled and enfeebled. It probably relates to what we refer to as depression—a heavy, hopeless place in which one has little energy, practically no interest in anything, and one cannot concentrate or make sense of things. The exchange here is a garment of praise. When things seem hopeless, and we can find no way through it, praise is far from our vocabulary or experience. And the Scripture refers to a “spirit” of heaviness. People who focus on spiritual warfare will then say that deliverance is what is needed, with the implication that then everything will be fine. While there no doubt is spiritual oppression involved in this condition of heaviness, there are most likely emotional underpinnings that make oppression *effective*. One of the things Wilson says about “spirit” is that it refers to the rational soul, mind, spirit, as the seat of affections, emotions and passions of various kinds. It refers to our disposition, our mode of feeling and acting. A person suffering from this kind of heaviness has lost passion, feels feeble, dark and hopeless; they cannot see a way through it or any basis on which things could change—thus the despondency.

A belief that things are hopeless is usually based on the fact that we have not been able to change them. And I have found that one of the roots of depression is a lack of self worth—believing that one has little or no value is quite depressing. That can be caused by what has happened, by feelings of failure, because the crushing messages received in life can no longer be held at bay, or because things have gone downhill for too long and we can no longer hope for blessing. Whatever the cause, it is another instance of something we could never get the Lord to agree with. Clearly, His children have great value to him, as He laid down His life on our behalf. The first step of the journey through heaviness is to be joined in it by One who brings the light we need. Heaviness or depression usually leads people to withdraw into isolation, and generally we cannot restore perspective alone. Helping them break through to the Lord and see what He exchanges for their heaviness in itself starts to lift it. He is neither feeble, nor hopeless, and interaction with Him

reveals our value and worth to Him.

Once people feel any lifting of heaviness, they have a sense of thankfulness and praise. As that continues and becomes stronger and more established, praise grows and becomes brighter and shinier. Wilson says that the word "praise" means to shine, to give forth a clear and distinct sound. That is far from confusion and feebleness, heaviness and despair. As encounters with the Lord continue his comfort registers and so does the reviving it produces. Then some sense that there may be purpose and hope for the future. The heaviness is breaking up at this stage, being exchanged for a new garment. The means, in all of these exchanges, is seeing and believing the Lord instead of what we have believed. Here's my paraphrase of what I hear the Lord saying:

Rejoice, you who have gotten so beat up on your journey that you think you are destroyed and disqualified. You stand to discover that in mourning those losses and seeming destruction with the Lord, and letting His comfort breathe life into your heart, the losses and pain will become the elements that qualify you. They will be your credentials, that which causes you to "get it" when ministering to others as they pour out *their* confusion, which you will recognize clearly.

So I can sit down, spend a few minutes on each exchange, and then I am ready to go, right? No. We are talking about a way of life, a place we visit regularly, every time there is need, and through each occasion for these exchanges we come to know the Lord more deeply, know our own heart, and learn to unite it through and through!

Moving through barriers with someone present who can make sense of them, conveys being heard, cared about, valued, and it communicates the probability that God *is* even more caring than the helper. Perhaps He is pursuing after all! Maybe it *is* the confusion and fear and misperception of Him that has blocked awareness, rather than unwillingness on His part to be found.

If we are to be filled with the Spirit of God and enjoy the light and strength, joy and beauty of the Lord, He will have to come into the hidden places of our heart. There seems to be no way out of it. Else, we harbor pain and shakiness instead of exchanging them for the security of His love and comfort.

Conclusion

There are three other verses I want to look at which further describe the outcome of this work the Lord came to do in each heart. Is. 61: 7a says:

Instead of your shame you shall have double honor,

And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.

It is virtually impossible to get through life free from shame or confusion, and they are great robbers. Even if we *could* escape shaming messages being pronounced over us, there would still be the underlying shame of missing our Creator, being confused about *how* to get back, and the question as to whether He wants us back. People wrestle with these things continually, though they don't always call it that and don't know what to call the heart struggle in relationship to God. The Lord has exchanges for these robbers as well. Instead of shame, whether false (someone's opinion produced it), or true (we actually betrayed God), He means to give double honor to those who will go with Him into newness. Instead of confusion we will be certain of our portion with the Lord and be able to rejoice in it! Freeing us from shame and lifting the groping confusion from our lives are both transformations of great magnitude, certainly not the kind of reviving we can do ourselves. Our deepest need is to be united with our eternal Father, to know the bond is intact, despite all the waves and storms that have sought to sever it.

Isaiah 61: 10 says:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,

My soul shall be joyful in my God;

For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,

And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

The garments in which the Lord clothes us are glorious, comparable only to wedding attire. Indeed He is reclaiming His bride, and in her restored condition she manifests to the world both the Bridegroom who saved her and her own joy in being rescued, restored, and united in love.

The rejoicing is in *Him*. It is not over circumstances, events or things he has done for us. Having our rejoicing *in Him* means that it can be sustained, despite the conditions around us—that outcome is quite a wonder for those who have been regularly shaken by adversity. "My soul shall be joyful in my God" (Is. 61:10). Finding our home, being met and cherished, healed and restored, makes our whole being joyful in the One who has undertaken and pulled off such a venture!

Is. 61:11 For as the earth brings forth its bud,

As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth,

So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

This verse compares the work of God in us to the way the earth brings forth fruit. The garden of the earth brings forth fruit, God working in us causes righteousness (a transformed life) and praise (to the One who accomplished it) to "spring forth before all the nations." Transformed lives springing forth in full view is the Church of His Spirit—unlocked, populated, and resounding! In the 11 verses of Isaiah 61 He declares the condition He comes to heal, how He will work healing, the outcome in those who respond to His offer, and how glorious His revived and restored body will be in the world!

We are all somewhere in this progression with Him, on this journey of discovery of how we are actually put together, how we are designed to function, and what we look like returned to the joy of unity with the One who holds it all together. This is the same work Paul is exhorting the Ephesians to invest their energy in and he identifies a similar outcome.

*Ephesians 4:17-24 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have **heard Him** and have been **taught by Him**, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct,*

the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

We may be in the synagogue or church hearing the Scripture read and very unclear about how it applies to us or how we are to take it up. We may be on the slippery ground of first moving into greater vulnerability with the Lord. We may be beginning to experience the freedom of His healing and the depth of His comfort. We may be getting used to the honesty of mourning and the joy of being restored. Wherever we are on our journey, Isaiah 61 is a light to our path.

Here at the end of Section I we can safely conclude that the breakdown is on *our* side. Part of the good news is that it is not God withdrawing! He is the One committed to fellowship being restored fully. There is a clear picture of this in Is. 42, where it is plain that His promise and desire for us bump into our debris and have a hard time getting through to lodge in our hearts.

The first 21 verses of Is. 42 are about the promise, the rescue, and the guidance of the Lord.

1 Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!

4 He will not fail nor be discouraged

Till He has established justice in the earth....

9 Behold, the former things have come to pass,

And new things I declare;

Before they spring forth I tell you of them.

16 I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;

I will lead them in paths they have not known.

I will make darkness light before them,

And crooked places straight.

These things I will do for them,

And not forsake them.

God is full of promise and purpose for His people. Then we come to verse 22 where it says
BUT...

22 But this is a people robbed and plundered;

All of them are snared in holes,

And they are hidden in prison houses;

They are for a prey, and no one delivers;

For plunder, and no one says "Restore!"

God is ever the One after us! The factors which produce separation and internal aloneness are hiding, protecting our heart, and thinking we see when our blindness is mysteriously profound. There is no way to maintain protections and have connection, too. We must learn to dismantle the separators, the focus of Section II.