

# EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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## ISAIAH CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

### THE ANOINTED SERVANT AND HIS MINISTRY

IN CHAPTER sixty-one we have the portion to which the Lord Jesus directed His hearers' attention when He went into the synagogue at Nazareth. After His baptism in the Jordan and His temptation in the wilderness He came up through Judea - He gave the Word in Judea - into Galilee and entered into the city where He had been brought up - Nazareth. There, we are told, that as His custom was on a Sabbath day, He went into the synagogue. That is very significant. As already remarked, we have but little information as to the early days of the Lord Jesus Christ, and men have tried to imagine what may have taken place between His childhood and His thirtieth year, when He went forth to be baptized by John, as He consecrated Himself to His great work.

In connection with this, all sorts of vain imaginations have been indulged in. Some years ago, a Russian wrote a book purporting to be a translation of a record that he found in a Lama monastery in Tibet, and supposed to be a record of the journeys of Issah. It was taken for granted that Issah was to be identified with Jesus, and that he came from Palestine through India to Tibet, and among the lamas learned secrets that enabled him to perform miracles. Eventually he went back to Palestine to begin his work, but was suspected by the Jewish leaders of trying to subvert their teaching and at last was crucified. Many hailed this at first as a wonderful discovery which might add to our knowledge of Jesus, but finally the author confessed that it was a forgery, and that he had written it himself.

People have tried to imagine what Jesus may have done during those years, but Scripture says that when some of His townspeople came to hear Him, they said: "**Is not this the carpenter?**" They had known Him as a carpenter. And Luke says that He went as His custom was on the Sabbath day into the synagogue. It shows that the Lord Jesus not only submitted Himself to the obedience of the laws divinely given, but also to the ordinary regulations of the rabbis, and attended the synagogue service and apparently took part in it.

They would recognize Him as one who had a right to go up to the dais and read from the Holy Scriptures. In that synagogue at Nazareth was handed to Him the book of the prophet Isaiah; this book, the last part, too, of this book - and it is called the prophet Isaiah.

**“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”** (verses 1, 2a).

Then He closed the book. He read to the middle of the sentence but then He closed the book. Why did He not go on with Isaiah’s words? Because those verses tell what He came to do at His first coming. His first and His second comings are intimately linked together in this chapter of Isaiah.

- He came to preach deliverance to captives,
- He came to give sight to the blind, to open the prisons of those that are bound,
- He came to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

There He stopped at what we would call a comma. He put this whole dispensation in which you and I live into that comma. It is the acceptable year of the Lord still. We have not moved one iota beyond that point where He closed the book. Why did He close it there? Because the rest of the sentence would carry us on into the day of the Lord after this present age has come to an end. So now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Speaking metaphorically, when He comes again He will open that book once more to the rest of this passage and it will all be fulfilled to the letter.

**“And the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified”** (verses 2b, 3).

It is a wonderful linking of the first and second comings. He came to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, He is coming again to declare the day of vengeance of our God. When God destroys those who are in red-handed opposition to Himself, and the enemies of His people Israel, it will be the time of the Lord’s vengeance.

Then our Lord will bring comfort and blessing to those who have suffered so much. **“To comfort all that mourn.”** This glorious prophecy will be fulfilled literally for all Israel after the judgments of the day of the Lord have been poured out upon the wicked. Meantime, each individual soul who trusts in Christ may enjoy the blessings here enumerated. Christ gives the wedding garments of praise in place of the funeral attire of the mourner of which the ashes and the garment of heaviness speak. Those who have sought in vain for peace and satisfaction in the world and whose fondest hopes have failed may find fullness of joy and satisfaction in Christ, who is glorified in all His saints and who finds His joy in their eternal blessing.

Our English word **“comfort”** is from two Latin roots, *con*, to be with, and *fortis*, strong. It literally means *“to strengthen by companionship.”* A child, with a long walk before him on a dark night, may be filled with fear. But if his father is with him to take his hand, all fear is gone as they walk together through the gloom of the night.

So God would have us realize the blessed reality of His presence with us as we face the trials and griefs to which all are exposed while passing through the changing scenes of time and sense. It is this that will keep the heart in peace and free the spirit from fear. Nothing can come to those who know the Lord but what His love allows and which He will use for our blessing as we go through it all in subjection to His holy will and implicit dependence upon Himself.

**“Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”**

The figures suggest a funeral and a wedding. At a funeral service Jews put ashes upon their heads and mourn and lament; at a wedding, they wear beautiful bridal wreaths and garments of praise. Israel’s long centuries of mourning will be over and she will enter into the joyousness of her marriage to the Lord with all the blessings attendant upon it.

We are living now in the parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel, between the beginning of the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God.

Other passages contain the same thought. For instance, the Apostle Peter speaks of those who would see good days, who seek peace and ensue it, for the face of the Lord is against them that do iniquity. He stops there. The Old Testament continues, **“to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.”** That day has not yet come. God’s face is still against wickedness and corruption, but the day has not come when He will cut off the remembrance of evil-doers from the earth. We can still preach the Gospel of the grace of God and offer salvation to the worst sinner. To the vilest sinners, those who have done the very worst, God is offering His grace. We are living in this period between the first coming of Christ and His second coming, the one having to do with the fulfillment of these early prophecies and the other with the later ones - all linked up - with the restoration of Israel and the blessing of the whole Gentile world.

**“But ye shall be named the priests of the Lord: men shall call you the ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves”** (verse 6).

The nation of Israel then will be a nation of priests, who will go into God’s presence on behalf of all the other peoples of the earth, and also be God’s messengers to them.

**“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be Joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth 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”** (verses 10, 11).

How much these wonderful promises should mean to God’s earthly people, and how we should be interested in them! Our blessings are heavenly. Theirs, to a great extent, will be earthly, and yet their salvation is just the same as our salvation. “He hath clothed me,” they will be able to sing in that day, **“with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of [His] righteousness.”**

Is not that true of us today? We who at one time were trying to piece out a covering for ourselves with the filthy rags of our own unrighteousness have cast that to one side and can say, **“He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of [His] righteousness.”**

God has provided a righteousness for men and women who have none of their own. And in that coming day, Israel will learn this precious truth - they will give up all pretense of their human righteousness and rejoice in the righteousness of God which will be bestowed upon them.

The prophet Jeremiah referring to this time says, **“This is His name whereby He shall be called, [Jehovah-tsidkenu] the Lord our Righteousness.”** And then a little farther on in his prophecy, speaking of Jerusalem and its restoration, he says, **“This is the name whereby she shall be called, [Jehovah-tsidkenu] the Lord our Righteousness,”** recognizing that she has no righteousness of her own, but the day will come when the people of Israel will find their righteousness in the Lord God Himself. What a blessed thing it is when we have learned that lesson even now! So many people have never learned it.

Years ago it was no easy thing when a colored school was first started in Dallas. There was no help financially, and as we vainly tried to interest people, I began to wonder if it was worthwhile to do anything for these colored people. After the third year as I was in Dallas to lecture I went to the school to give an address there one night. I said to my son, “It costs so much to run this and you are giving your very life for it, and I don’t know whether it is really worthwhile.” He looked at me rather strangely, and then said, “Why don’t you ask the men what they think about it?”

So before speaking that night, I said, “I would like to know what you men think of it. Is it a worthwhile investment? Are you getting enough out of it?” For many minutes there was not a sound. They sat there with downcast faces and no one said a word.

Finally one man got up and said, “I’ve been wondering if I heard aright. Did I understand that this school may be closed? If this school is closed, then I shall feel that the last bit of light for us poor colored people in Dallas has gone out, and we are just to be left in the dark. Let me tell you how I was in the dark.

I was a pastor of a church for thirteen years. I didn’t know the Gospel. I didn’t know how sinners were saved. I preached. The people came together and I baptized them and they joined the church - and they shouted and they went on. I thought if I put on plenty of ‘arousements’ and got them all going, that that was the power of the Holy Spirit. I heard about this school, but I was kind of prejudiced when I heard a white man was running it. I thought there must be something queer about it. But finally I came one night.”

He turned to me and went on, “Your son was speaking that night on the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. It took away from me all the religion I’d been building up for thirteen years. I just sat there in a daze as he tore off one filthy rag after another until I stood there naked before God. I had no righteousness of my own and I thought I had so much. I thought I was doing so well.

“I went out of the class that night and went home, and said, ‘What am I going to do? All that I’ve tried to do to fit myself for heaven is gone. I haven’t anything left.’ I could hardly wait for the next class two nights later. That night he began in the middle of the third chapter of Romans and he went on to show that God had a righteousness for men who had none of their own. Oh, I can’t tell you what that meant to me! I found out that night I didn’t have to provide my own righteousness, God had provided one, and if I just trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, I was made the righteousness of God in Him.

From that day to this I’ve been preaching the righteousness of God, and my people have been learning to see this great truth. Brother, don’t close up this school - it’s the only place I know where they open up these things to us colored folks.”

Many people try to build up a righteousness of their own - and poor Israel is doing that. The Apostle Paul says, “**They being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God**” (Romans 10:3).

In this coming day everything will be changed. Their eyes opened, they will see in Christ their Redeemer and be able to sing with gladness, “**He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation . . . covered me with the robe of righteousness.**”

~ end of chapter 61 ~

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