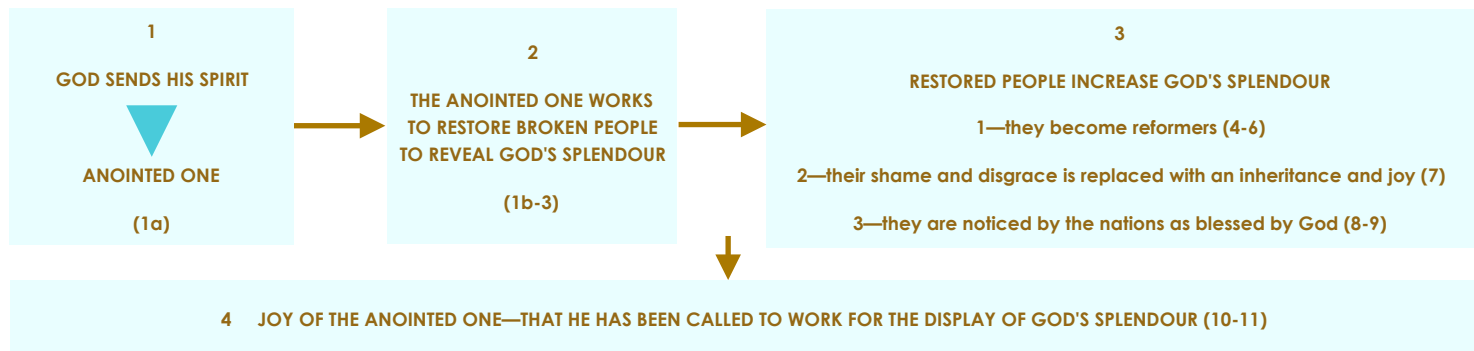


revealing God's splendour

God's vision for a Spirit-anointed church

KEY TEXT—ISAIAH 61

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH 61



WHERE ARE WE GOING? WHAT ARE WE DOING?

I think I have successfully navigated my way through any potential mid-life crisis. One afternoon, I did look briefly at the possibility of getting a two-seater sports car, but common sense easily prevailed. But there are times in our lives, and in the life of the church, where we wonder who we are and what we are supposed to be doing. Sometimes it can feel like quite a crisis if we don't know the answer to our questions for purpose and meaning.

So as you think about your mission, and the mission of this church in the coming years, where will you look to know if you are on track, rather than simply enjoying yourselves? In this sermon I will take a birds-eye view of one answer in Isaiah 61.

GOD'S VISION FOR HIS CHURCH

1—vision is received by a humble heart (1a)

Notice something so obvious it might easily be missed. In v1 the Servant says, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because **the Lord has anointed me...**" The Servant has been anointed because God has decided it. God is the initiator of the anointing. Look at some examples of God as originator:

- **v1-3** (1) **He has sent me to...**proclaim...bind up...(2) proclaim...release...(3) comfort...bestow..."
- **v10-11** (10) For **he has clothed me** with garments of salvation... (11) **the Sovereign Lord will make** righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

The Servant does nothing by his own initiative—only through the Holy Spirit. Every idea, plan, motivation and all energy and power, comes from Spirit that the Lord has sent to Him. As Paul writes to Timothy, "No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer." (2 Timothy 2:4) Yielding to the vision of the Spirit is the only thing that matters to the Servant, but this yielding could only happen because He has a humble heart.

2—key priorities of God's Spirit-led vision (1b-3)

What does God's Spirit inspire His Servant to do? Or put another way, what are the priorities for mission in God's church? The Servant declares: "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,
- **to proclaim** the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God,
- **to comfort** all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
- **to bestow** on them (1) a crown of beauty instead of ashes, (2) the oil of joy instead of mourning, and (3) a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

While this is a list of the Spirit's priorities for the Servant, what is the overarching purpose for the Spirit's anointing? Here is the punch line, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord **for the display of his splendour.**" (v3) **God anoints His Servant to restore hurting and broken people for the eternal purpose of putting His own glory on display.**

3—evidence of God's vision succeeding (4-9)

So how do we know—evaluate—if God's Servant is being successful? How do we know if our work for God is really accomplishing the Spirit's vision of putting God's splendour on display—or if we are just enjoying ourselves? Look for 3 things:

evidence 1—restored people will act like reformers (4-6)

Restored people who genuinely reveal God's splendour will start behaving as reformers. Verse 4 describes, "They will

- **rebuild** the ancient ruins and
- **restore** the places long devastated; they will
- **renew** the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations"

Their mission is so all consuming that other people will look after the ordinary tasks at home, "5 Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards." Their new role as restored, Spirit anointed people, focuses on priestly mission, for "6 you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast."

But what is to be rebuilt, restored and renewed? In this context, the temple and Jerusalem lay in ruins. But it appears that God's is looking beyond renovating buildings, for they are to act as priests. This shows that the renovation work of these restored people was to focus on spiritual restoration. Indeed, in Isaiah 58, God links the rebuilding of broken walls to the way his own people need to restore the way they keep Sabbath (58:12-14). So among God's restored people, we should be able to see a reformation of lost and lax spiritual beliefs and practices.

evidence 2—restored people have their shame and disgrace replaced with a increased prosperity and joy (7)

God's people have been in Assyrian exiled due to gross, persistent, sin, and would soon be living under the fierce yoke of the Babylonians. This was shameful. Their weakness in the eyes of the surrounding nations was a source of great ridicule, not just on them as a people, but on their God—who was apparently impotent to help His people. But verse 7 promises something amazing. Their shame was going to be replaced with blessing and joy. What evidence could we look for that indicates God's vision is succeeding through His Servant that hurting people are being renewed? Look for the evidence of God's blessing and joy that cannot be hidden.

evidence 3—restored people are noticed in the workplace as people blessed by God (8-9)

This idea continues to be emphasised in verses 8-9. God says that He hates the injustice that has afflicted his people through the Assyrians and soon through the Babylonians. So He promises to reverse their situation. They are now going to be marvelled at because God's faithfulness is going to lavish grace upon them—so the surrounding nations will point at them and declare, "they are a people the Lord has blessed!"

So three elements will reveal if God's Spirit-led vision is succeeding. Can we see the people we are restoring—

1. Involved in acts of spiritual rebuilding?
2. Experiencing joy and blessing because their shame and disgrace has been removed?
3. Being pointed at by people who can see the Spirit of the Living God in them—as pagan Pharaoh saw in Joseph?

So we have a 3 point evaluation tool. If we cannot see these 3 things in our work for God, then His vision is not being implemented properly and we need to sort it out.

4—consequences for servants in God's vision (10-11)

The last two verses read more like a song. They contain the joy of the Servant who is involved in working to restore broken people. **Delight and joy abounds for 2 reasons:**

1. **God has given Him this glorious task to work for others** (v10). He is so thankful to be part of God's purposes.
2. **God's splendour will inevitably become increasingly visible** (v11). You plant something in the soil and it will certainly grow. So of course! God will certainly reveal His righteousness and praise publicly to the world!

APPLICATION

We have looked at this chapter with very broad brush strokes to get the main concepts of how God sends His Spirit on His Servant for a mission to restore people who will "display His splendour." To conclude, consider these 5 questions:

1. Am I—are we—characterised by a humble heart that causes us to practically depend on God to show us what His mission is—rather than what I / we may be personally excited about?
2. Are my priorities the same as the priorities of God's Servant? (1b-3) Do I want to do other things instead?
3. Are we / am I conscious that God's mission is to display His splendour, and is our decision-making aligned with that?
4. Do we see the evidence of God's vision for His church succeeding, and what might we do better?
5. Are you experiencing the joy of the Servant because you are being used by the Spirit as an agent of salvation?

1

LIFE POINT

God's vision for His church is to display His splendour

2

LIFE POINT

God's splendour is displayed by restoring broken people

3

LIFE POINT

we can evaluate if God's vision is succeeding

4

LIFE POINT

imitating the work of God's Servant will always lead to joy