

# Isaiah 61 – 63:6

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This section (59-63) is not as well known to many Christians as the earlier chapters with the Servant Songs. Again there are four units which center on Christ; one of which, 61:1-3, is famous because Jesus quoted it of himself in Luke 4:16-21. All four references appear close together: **59:21; 61:1-3; 61:10 – 62:7; 63:1-6.**

So much of 56-59 has been about sin that it is clear a Savior is needed. Christ has been shown in 52,53 as the One who would die for sinners; now Isaiah shows that he is also the One who will proclaim the gospel (Hebrews 2:3). He will do what is needed in sinful hearts to bring about all that God promised in 51:5 & 56:1. The basis of the gospel is the cross of Christ. To finish the work, that gospel must be delivered by proclamation and a proper response to it generated in the hearts of sinners. All God intended in the death of Christ must be brought to completion in his people. This section also shows that all who remain rebels must be brought to justice as God takes vengeance on them. The prophet shows the final end of the two sets of people: those who repent and those who do not.

**The Role of the Spirit** The work of Christ is connected closely to the Holy Spirit coming on Christ in 59:21 and 61:1-3, as the Lord Jesus is commissioned and empowered for his work. While 61:10 – 62:7 does not mention the Spirit, it reiterates that the Father clothed Jesus for his work (61:10), which is a way to depict the endowment of the Spirit in all the activity of the Messiah. The Father sending the Spirit on Christ is his anointing. This shows that Christ is the only one chosen for the task of Redeemer, as well as his being the One to bring the entire plan of salvation and judgment to a climax. The Lord Jesus was equipped for this by his reception of the Spirit. This shows that the Father appointed Christ to the unique ministry of being the Sole Savior (earlier in Isaiah) and now here, the Final Executor of the divine agenda.

The Hebrew word for the *anointed one* is “Messiah”; in Greek, it is “Christ”. These Isaiah Scriptures predict Jesus’ anointing at his baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), and they fit John 3:34 exactly. Jesus was conceived by the Spirit (Matthew 1:18-20), was led by him (Matthew 4:1), was full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1), worked in the Spirit’s power (Luke 4:14), and was full of joy through the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21). He even made his offering on the cross through the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14), and through the Spirit of Holiness was declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. It is this same Spirit who is promised to all who are his (Acts 2:33, 38).

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**61:1-3 The Second Reference to Christ in this Segment of Isaiah.** (The first was 59:21.) Just as in the second Servant Song (49:1-6), Christ speaks of himself and his work empowered by the Spirit. Here it is to deliver the Word of God. In Luke 4 after his temptation in the desert, Jesus went home to Nazareth and read half of 61:1-3 in the synagogue. In his first coming, he had come to save (John 3:17), so he read: “*the year of the Lord’s favor*”, but stopped before it spoke of “*the day of vengeance*”. The vengeance will come at his Second Coming. In many passages we read of what Jesus did and said. Here is an explanation of his mission some 700 years before his birth.

Much that the Lord Jesus did and said was to relieve the consequences of sin in people’s experience. What is mentioned here is the misery sin brings on mankind. Christ came to proclaim a message to those who suffer. Though his ministry included many miracles and good works (Acts 10:38), most often his activity was *speaking* God’s Word. This prophetic aspect dominates the first word to the One anointed to execute the Lord’s purpose (59:21).

‘Proclaim liberty’ – this is the language of the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10), which came at an appointed time. Christ too, came at the *time* of God’s choosing (Galatians 4:4) to proclaim liberty (Luke 1:74, 75). Many who read Isaiah 61 use it to call for rebellion and revolution, but the liberty

Jesus proclaimed was a rescue from sin, accomplished not by a sword against men but by proclamation of the gospel to sinners. The sword is not in our hands. When judgment comes in the future (the “vengeance” of v.2), it is the Lord who acts in vengeance. The sword is never properly in our hands. Vengeance belongs only to God (Romans 12:17-21; 13:1-5). Jesus never attacked the Roman government. He rescued from a different kingdom, the dominion of Satan’s darkness, and brought those he rescued into his kingdom (Colossians 1:12-14) through the gospel. Those who argue that man’s problem is human institutions should observe that the ministry of Jesus was to deal with human sin by God’s Word. In its message, the Lord removes guilt, gives the Spirit to cleanse, and informs of a future salvation when all wrong is put down. The future day of vengeance will be sharp and quick, but the year of favor has been long.

The mourning of v.3 ties to repentance. This turn from sin is necessary for the joy and righteousness that follows. No one can believe in Christ while determined to live in sin.

After revealing the things Christ will do, v.3 gives results: “they will be called” and v.4 “they will rebuild”. They are called oaks of righteousness, thus the transformation is from sin. When they are called righteous, this is a declarative statement about them. It is God who calls them oaks of righteousness. Transformed sinners display the Lord’s splendor.

Only two situations fit such a description: 1) the justified are fully righteous, not in their improved lives, but in their status in Christ – his righteousness being a gift to them, 2) when salvation is finished, they will be fully righteous in conduct when they are glorified – his righteousness being finished in them only then. Since it is God who did the planting, there is no reference to their participation; it is done to them. The transformation is all by the Father through Christ, empowered by his Spirit using his Word.

**61:4** They will rebuild. Every Jew reading this would think of Jerusalem destroyed by foreigners. The ministry of Christ the Messiah, will mean the recovery of all that has been lost in all of his creation (Romans 8:18-25). The completion of his work will be to restore everything (Acts 3:21; Matthew 19:28), and eventually to hand over to his Father a redeemed kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24).

**61:5-9** The gospel is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). God’s people as priests mediated God’s truth and blessing to the nations. The ones new to the faith are grateful and gladly serve the people they once mistreated, and call them “priests of the Lord”. The true Israel, in the aftermath of the first coming of Christ, became a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). This holy nation now includes Gentiles, because they believe. They minister to the world the riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8). This is what is now happening in the spread of the gospel. The grateful response in 61:6 is pictured as wealth returning to those who were the means of blessing.

Like 59:21, Isaiah 61 sets out a ministry that was Christ’s, which then (except for the aspect of vengeance) continues in the ministry of his people who also serve. Shame is removed; they inherit possessions that will never be lost again. They are rewarded for the obedient service God has graciously produced in them, thus the glory is all God’s while a reward is theirs. Why does God treat them so? He says it is based in his justice! (v.8). Not only is his vengeance just, so is his salvation. He will not neglect to reward his faithful people. Yet it is not a matter of their faithfulness but his, because his reward to them is part of the everlasting covenant. This covenant rests completely on the faithfulness of Christ, though it produces faithfulness to Christ. His servants cannot be denied

anything Christ has earned for them. He is the Mediator who acquires all blessing for his people and has deserved all things for us (Colossians 3:1-4; 1Corinthians 3:18-22). Our inheritance cannot be lost (1 Peter 1:3-6). God gave his Son for us, and with him the Father also gives all things (Romans 8:32). In an unbreakable, secure, and everlasting covenant, it is not possible to be separated from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:31-39).

Like a city on a hill, the transformed people are noticed by the world (Matthew 5:14-16). The quality of their lives cannot be missed. The City will be righteous again (1:26). The same Spirit that is on Christ (59:21, 61:1) has been poured on us (44:3). He will produce righteousness and all its effects (32:15-17).

**61:10 – 62:7 The Third Reference to Christ** These words of Christ express his determination to see his assignment finished, as well as his great delight in that assigned ministry. His work will not be frustrated. His human concern expressed in 49:4 is now settled, and he looks to the joy ahead (Hebrews 12:2). His work is accomplished in reliance on God, so it emphasizes prayer. Everything Christ did was from the Father working in him (John 5:19-23). It is a sin for a man to dress in the clothing of a woman (Deuteronomy 22:5), because doing so is a false communication, and the deliberate confusion of a distinction the Lord has made. It is deceit for a man who is not a policeman to put on a police uniform. When God put the garments of salvation on Christ, he thereby proclaimed the truth that Jesus is the One called to save.

**61:10, 11** Some say it is Zion speaking here of being clothed in righteousness. Such a change is true of believers, but I accept the view that it is Christ speaking. The Father had clothed himself for saving action in 59:15-17. Now this clothing of Christ is a parallel to the Father's to show that he is the Father's Agent to produce righteousness. This is different from clothing us with righteousness, as recipients of it (Revelation 6:11; 19:14). The Lord spoke to Christ as the Covenant Mediator for the people (59:21). These verses turn more and more to what Christ will do (61:1-3). Now in v.10 the Father's work is laid on Christ as the Lord Jesus is clothed with the garments of One assigned to intervene and save (59:16). The Father always works by means of the Son (John 5:19-27). As a man and woman dress their best for their wedding day, so the Father dresses Christ for his special work. The Father would save the world through him. Christ is the Father's agent of salvation, the One by whom the Father acts, and there is no other agent of God to do the same thing (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The Lord Jesus delights in what the Father gave him to do with words similar to what Mary said in Luke 1:46, 47. By dressing Jesus for salvation work, God identifies that this One, and only this One, will appear in the world as the chosen, anointed, designated Savior of mankind (2 Timothy 1:8-10). Because this is so, we must reject any and all other claims that present someone else as a Savior.

As surely as plants grow in a garden, what God has planned will succeed, because he will make it succeed (John 6:39, 40). Christ is not "on his own". Jesus is arrayed in a robe of righteousness to do whatever the righteous Lord requires for our salvation. The Lord will make righteousness appear, and will receive the praise his saving sinners deserves.

**62:1-3** V.2 repeats that salvation will happen in the observation of all nations (61:11). Yet the prayer and activity is for Zion, the people on earth by whom God would be known, with Zion the place to which they will come (2:2-4). They come with birthrights as if each had been born there (Psalm 87).

**Salvation Delivered** Christ prays and exerts himself that Zion may enjoy the fruits of his work. Clearly the delivery of salvation is not on a “take it or leave it” basis; the acceptance of salvation is the result of Christ’s determination to do all he intended. (Note the “I must” of John 10:16; it is not that his sheep might hear; they *will* “listen to my voice” and be saved.) Christ will not stop till Zion’s righteousness burns brightly, visible to nations and kings. When the nations see righteousness in God’s people, the brightness of God’s splendor is visible. 61:1-3 stressed proclamation and its effects; here results flow from a transformation the world can observe, as Zion becomes a crown the Lord is pleased to wear.

**A New Name** Since it is God calling the new name (v.2), a name that includes such terms as ‘righteous’ (61:11; 62:1), this shows that the new name given is a *declared* reality. Further, it is God who *bestows*, so it is a gift to his people. A bestowed righteousness is not a production of his people but a gift received from the Lord. In the Bible we are presented with both features: 1) righteousness as a gift (Romans 5:17) and 2) righteousness implanted (Titus 2:12; 3:5, 6). Gift righteousness is the nature of justification; renovation in righteousness is the nature of regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. We must distinguish between aspects of salvation: 1) the *objective* gift of a righteousness we have not lived, and 2) the *subjective* transformation of implanted obedience by the Spirit working in our lives.

**62:2-5** Zion changes from being deserted to being married. Marriage is always a change of status. Just as a man delights in the wife he loves, the Lord will delight in the land no longer desolate (61:4, 5). The analogy is mixed; their sons marry Zion and the Lord has a honeymoon delight in his bride. In the Babylonian captivity, Jerusalem was deserted and desolate. Eternal life in Zion and delight in her, both come from the work of Christ. This is the third stanza of four; Christ is the “I” in stanzas 2, 3 & 4. (See 61:10; 62:1 & 6: and 63:3). The benefits in these verses must be read in this context.

**62:6, 7** The Lord Jesus who prayed (62:1) has positioned watchmen to pray. (See Mark 13:33-37 & Luke 2:25-38.) It is God’s method to work this way, and by it he involves us in his purpose. One scholar says true prayer is ceaseless, vocal, effective, disciplined, urgent, and prevailing. Amen!

**62:8, 9** When Israel disobeyed, foreigners ate their crops (1:7 & Leviticus 26:14-17). This shall never happen again. This change is not because God has changed his principles, but because he has transformed his people. The Lord who makes oaths (Hebrews 6:13-15) has promised that they shall never be invaded again. They sinned; God punishes sin, yet God promised that invasion would never happen again. The reason is that God was satisfied in Christ regarding their sin, and he had brought them to repentance, faith, and obedience. So they will eat their own harvest, and praise the Lord for it as they eat in God’s presence.

**62:10-12** The picture of pilgrimage is repeated, as in 26:2 and 35:8-10. The peoples of the earth come to the Lord. The message to Zion and the ends of the earth is the same message. Usually Zion spoke to the world; here the ends of the earth speak to Zion, “Behold your salvation comes!” The One coming is Christ (Revelation 22:12, 13), the One to whom the Father has assigned our salvation (61:10). Christ’s reward is what he receives; his recompense is for the work he accomplished. In 53:12, what he earned for himself is his saved people, and what he has accomplished for them is that they will be saved. True ministry of the gospel proclaims what Christ has accomplished. The result of his work is holy people, redeemed people, people he sought and found (Luke 19:10; Ezekiel 34:11), and people he can never leave again (Hebrews 13:5, 6) since they will never sin again.

**63:1-6 The Fourth Reference to Christ** Again Christ is dressed in clothes to indicate his task. He moves in such majesty, observers ask who he is, and why his clothes are stained. (See 52:8-10). He replies that he speaks in righteousness (59:21; 61:1) and is mighty to save (61:10; 52:10). He comes from Edom. (See Genesis 25:30 for Edom meaning red). He comes from Bozrah, the place of a great slaughter (34:5-15) in the “*day of vengeance*” (61:2). God’s final judgment is pictured as Christ “*treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty*” (Revelation 14:19 & 20; 19:15). Only God has the right of vengeance (Deuteronomy 32:35). Since Christ is the One acting in vengeance, this too shows his deity.

**Final Judgment** The Savior from sin brings judgment on those still in their sins (John 8:21; Isaiah 57:21) – a judgment pictured as crushing grapes underfoot in a winepress. He acts alone in his wrath (Revelation 6:15-17; John 5:22, 27, 30). The stained clothes are from the blood of all in all nations who are not forgiven. His anger is not half-hearted but zealous (59:17). In the final judgment, mercy will be a thing of the past (Proverbs 1:20-33; Hebrews 10:26-31). God has responded with finality to all the sin recorded in 56-59, yet his vengeance is presented as salvation in 63:5 for his redeemed ones. The righteous suffer (57:1) in an environment of sin, but the Lord’s “own arm” brings great relief to them. The Lord’s coming in vengeance is a kind of salvation for his people (Romans 13:11). In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 the same appearance of Christ brings relief and rescue, as well as dire trouble in the unleashed wrath of God! Isaiah 63 does not invite acts of vengeance by us; it shows that only Christ is worthy of the exercise of justice. He is also the only One just enough to do it justly. He tramples underfoot (14:25), makes the nations drink a bitter cup (see 51:17, 21, 22), and pours their blood on the ground. His work of bearing our sin was finished on the cross; someday his work of vengeance will be finished as well. It ends up being a matter of his blood on the ground for us, or the blood of his rejecters on the ground by him.