

Jesus Brings the Good News That He Is the Good News

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1-3)

When Jesus began his public ministry in his hometown of Nazareth, he opens it by reading Isaiah 61:1-2. Then he says, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21). Through the words of Isaiah, Jesus is telling us that his work on earth and his work in heaven is centered on proclaiming good news to us, liberating us from captivity, binding of our broken hearts, and adorning us with glory and beauty. This is wonderful news!

However, the anxiety, busyness, and pressure of daily life, especially in our high school years, can lead us to feel adrift from the promises of Isaiah 61 rather than wrapped up in them. The anxiety of returning to new social circles that seem to constantly reshape themselves leaves us feeling alone. The busyness of classes, clubs, and sports leaves us feeling more wrung dry than built up. The pressure of success and status – the future and friendships – leaves us feeling inadequate.

In some ways, we feel the strain of being exiles in this world when we walk back in those doors for the first day of school.

At the time of Isaiah’s writing, this passage was a message of hope to a people in exile. In the first half of the book of Isaiah, Israel was delivered from conquest by the Lord despite their sinfulness (Is. 36-39). In the second half of the book, the people have become the victims of conquest under the rule of Babylon. This left the people with deeply painful questions, “What does it mean that the God who had delivered from Assyria would not deliver from Babylon? Would he still be trustworthy? Would he still be the Holy One like whom there is no other? Would he still be the Lord of the nations, who has history under his control?”¹

¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

Isaiah 61:1-3 provided a powerful answer to these questions. Even though the people were living as prisoners in Babylon, his servant would come to preach good news of freedom. The Lord had not abandoned them. He would be trustworthy to reverse the fortunes of the citizens of Zion. History was still under his control, for his year of favor and day of vengeance is coming. Only the Holy One of Israel could perform such a work, and his glory will be shown through it.

As you return to school this year, you may be walking into the unknown with lots of questions. Will God be with me even if I am alone? Will God be trustworthy even if the taunts and jokes of others target me? Does God hold my future in his hands even when my grades are not what I had hoped and the prospect of college and career hold me captive? The promises of Isaiah 61 are answered by Jesus' affirmation that he is the anointed servant who has come to be good news on behalf of his people, even in the midst of the unknown.

Jesus has proclaimed the ultimate good news to all those who are spiritually impoverished: he has died on their behalf to cover their sin. Jesus has proclaimed the ultimate liberty to those who are held captive by this world, its sins, and stresses: you are no longer bound to the slavery of making a name for yourself or chasing a life of fulfillment because Jesus has freed you to eternal life. This is most powerfully summed up in the promise that he has come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor: a time of total freedom, total healing, and total restoration.

As you return to school, you may count yourself among the afflicted, the broken-hearted, or the mourners, but the hope of Isaiah 61:1-3 is transformation from mourning into gladness and weariness into praise, all for the glory of God. Jesus himself works for you in such a way that no matter what you face when you step into the halls of school again, you will be met with his proclamation of good news, liberty, healing, and freedom.