

A Biblical View of Recovery: Isaiah 61:1-4

Isaiah 61: 1-4 is of primary importance today for two reasons. By quoting this passage in Luke 4 and citing Himself as the One to fulfill the prophecy, Jesus clearly states that He is the promised Messiah and King of the Jews with authority to redeem and deliver. This passage also sets forth six key aspects of Christ's ministry of redemption and (by implication) how they apply to His Church. In effect, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah and describing the nature of His ministry at the same time. We need to take a closer look at this passage in order to see the significance of what He was saying and how it applies to people with emotionally-based problems.

The Messianic passages in the Old Testament fall into two categories: One emphasizes that the Messiah would come as a "conquering king" or "deliverer"; the second describes the Messiah as a divine servant who would suffer and secure redemption for the people of Israel. Ironically, both descriptions refer to Jesus. The role of "suffering servant" describes Jesus in His first coming, while the role of "conquering king" refers to Jesus in His second coming. The Jews, as a whole, did not recognize Christ's first coming, and subsequently, are still looking for the Messiah to appear.

At the time of Christ, the Israelites were weary of foreign dominion. They had not experienced political freedom for centuries. After the Babylonian captivity they struggled with Greek control followed by Roman occupation. It is little wonder that the idea of a Messiah who would appear as a conquering king resonated with them. Unfortunately this emphasis caused them to minimize the Messiah's other role as suffering servant.

Chapter 61 is one of several passages in Isaiah that describe the Messiah as a "suffering servant". Others include: Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53; and chapter 53. The Jews generally applied these passages to themselves as a nation, claiming that they were the "suffering servant". Most scholars agree that these passages refer instead to a man often identified as the "Servant of God". This Servant was the Messiah, also appointed to be the mediator of a new covenant, the light of the Gentiles, the salvation of God for the whole world, and the one who would reach this glorious height through servanthood, a service leading to death.

Six Aspects of Christ's Ministry

Isaiah 61:1-4 describes many of the same elements contained in this booklet. Jesus quoted this passage at the beginning of His ministry in Luke 4:17-21 to both explain and

underscore the nature of His ministry. He concluded by saying, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”, indicating, as we will explain, that His ministry was designed, at least in part, to bring about healing from emotionally-based problems that result from the damages of sin. In these verses, Jesus mentions six components of His ministry that relate to healing emotional issues:

1. Proclaim the Good News to the poor
2. Bind up the brokenhearted
3. Proclaim freedom to the captives
4. Proclaim release to the prisoners from the darkness
5. Proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor / day of vengeance
6. To comfort all who mourn

The first aspect of Christ’s ministry that contributes to recovery from emotional damage, is the Gospel message, or Good News. Jesus proclaimed God’s love and forgiveness wherever He went, seeking to draw people to Himself for salvation. Becoming a Christian is foundational to the recovery process. Non-believers can heal to some degree, but people cannot heal fully until they experience His forgiveness and the new birth He offers.

A lack of forgiveness is a root cause of ongoing feelings of condemnation, and detrimental to the recovery process. To fully experience healing, we must receive forgiveness from God, forgive ourselves and forgive others. Jesus’ death and resurrection provides the only real basis for substantial forgiveness.

It is not coincidental that God’s offer of forgiveness was directed (initially) toward the poor. Everyone needs forgiveness, but people who have experienced poverty in any of its forms, are usually more aware of their need for help and forgiveness. The ability to acknowledge and receive forgiveness as a free gift from God through Christ, is the starting point for further recovery.

The second aspect of Christ’s ministry is “to bind up the brokenhearted”. In this passage, "brokenhearted" refers to people who have been deeply hurt (wounded-in-the-heart) and in need of substantial emotional healing. Taking our hurts directly to Christ promotes healing. He is, after all, a suffering servant who understands our hurts (Hebrews 4:15-16). But Christ also means for His church to be a place where healing can occur (I Corinthians 12:26). Wounded people need a safe environment where they feel emotionally protected as they express their hurts and receive validation from caring friends. People need to be able to grieve their losses in the presence of their Lord, and also in fellowship with His people.

The third aspect of Christ's ministry is "to proclaim freedom to the captives". Through His death and resurrection Christ defeated Satan and set His people free. There are two dimensions that were affected by this liberation. The first deliverance occurred in the spiritual realm and has a spiritual application, the second occurs in everyday life and has a very practical application.

In Scripture the spiritual dimension is also referred to as "the invisible realm". Though we can't see this dimension, it is a very real and substantial place. In this realm, Christ set us free in a very real and dramatic sense. Scripture asserts emphatically that believers have been "delivered from the dominion of Satan and brought into the Kingdom of God" (Colossians 1: 12-1). This deliverance means that Satan no longer has the legal, or moral, right to control or condemn the children of God. We may or may not experience this new freedom, but it remains true and substantive nonetheless. The implications are profound! The Kingdom of God is a place of freedom. We are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6; John 8:31-36), no longer captives.

But Christ also intends that we experience His freedom in the visible world. It is not enough that we simply understand the truth that the evil one no longer has authority to control and manipulate us, or that indwelling sin no longer dictates our choices. Christ wants us to experience this truth regarding our deliverance in a real and substantial way. There is a practical dimension involved in this deliverance.

Though legally defeated, Satan continues to exert his control over people, holding them captive in two ways. The first way is through the "schemes of the devil", habitual strategies that we embraced in an attempt to offset the effects of sin. They evolve into addictions and defense mechanisms that people use to address unresolved pain. If we continue to use old mechanisms to deal with our pain, rather than rely upon Christ, we remain (literally) in bondage to them, to sin, and to the evil one. This passage reminds us that Jesus came to set us free from these unhealthy ways of living. Through His guidance and power we can recognize and replace these unhealthy practices with more effective and healthy ways of living.

But there is a second way that the enemy keeps us captive. In addition to encouraging addictions that can persist long after people accept Christ, Satan also blinds people to truth, effectively keeping them prisoners in the dark. But Christ wants to release us from the captivity of darkness. This fourth aspect of His ministry, "to proclaim release from darkness to the prisoners", is what we will now consider.

Scripture states that Satan has the power to blind unbelievers (II Corinthians 4:4) and does so very effectively, preventing them from seeing the truth about Christ and His

Kingdom. But at salvation, Satan's power to keep people in the dark is removed. In addition to being set free from the dominion of Satan, we are also set free from the darkness of unbelief. Now we have the capacity to see things clearly.

But Satan's blinding activities continue to exist and can remain effective even after people accept Christ. These activities occur directly through spiritual attacks, and indirectly through a world system of lies that Satan retains control over until Christ returns. These strategies are intended to confuse and mislead Christians, keeping them away from Christ, and in effect, prisoners of the evil one. Over time they evolve into belief systems, strongly held emotional convictions that shape our view of the world, others, and ourselves. Though believers now have the capacity to recognize these lies, they often fail to because they have not "trained themselves to discern good from evil". Jesus came to lead us out of the darkness into the light. The light is the truth. It is the truth that sets us free. Part of the process of healing from the damages of sin involves increasingly replacing wrong beliefs with the truth.

When I first studied these verses in Isaiah as a paradigm for promoting healing ministries in the church, I thought that these descriptions represented the needs of different groups of people who needed different kinds of help. But as I continued to research this matter, I began to realize that everyone (to some degree) had all these needs, and were in need of healing in each area.

Everyone needs Christ for salvation, and for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. Everyone needs to process unresolved pain and learn how to deal with emotions correctly. Everyone needs God's direction and power to deal with the addictions and unhealthy defense mechanisms they use to deal with pain. Everyone also needs help replacing wrong beliefs with the truth. Isaiah 61:1-2 describes the recovery Christ brings to all people, and His ministry is designed to provide healing in all areas. Incidentally, these were the same areas I had discovered were keeping people in bondage (see pages 7-9 and Addendum A).

Built into Christ's ministry was a recovery process that heals the damage of sin. During His earthly ministry, Christ introduced a restorative process that roughly parallels the early stages of human relational/emotional formation identified by many childhood development specialists. This restorative process, carried out in a small group that imitates many of the dynamics of the family-of-origin, provided a safe environment for dealing with wounds and reinforcing the tasks associated with healthy development.

We must remember that Jesus does not deliver us from all of the damage instantaneously. Though forgiveness is granted at the moment of salvation, it may take time for people to fully realize it, or appreciate it. The other areas (unresolved pain,

addictions, defense mechanisms, and false belief systems) may take even longer to correct. In truth, some of these may be so ingrained that we struggle with them for the remainder of our time on earth. But for sustained spiritual growth to occur, we must continue to heal from the damages of sin in these areas.

The fifth aspect of Christ ministry is “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God”. The day will come when Jesus will return to gather His people and reward them for what they suffered on His behalf. Conversely, He will dispense wrath to those who rejected Him. Everyone will receive their just reward, either for good or evil (Romans 2:5-11). Armed with the knowledge that God offers forgiveness, but that He will eventually punish all evil, enables those who have been hurt to forgive those who hurt them. They realize it is not their responsibility, or prerogative, to take revenge (Romans 12:19). Only God can right all the wrongs.

The sixth and last aspect of Christ’s ministry is “to comfort all who mourn”. Mourning is not a pleasant experience in and of itself. Grieving our losses causes us to feel depressed or sad. But this process is a necessary step in healing us from the damages of sin. Jesus promises to be “a very present help in time of trouble” and a comfort for people who mourn. In Isaiah, He also promises “to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair”. This describes what happens after people complete the grieving process: (viz.) they begin to live again. They are able to feel joy (gladness). Their countenance changes (beauty) because they feel better and have been released from the stress caused by buried emotions. They want to give praise to their God.

The Impact of a Healing Ministry

But more happens than just this. When people have experienced significant healing, they are able to grow into healthy and solid believers. The prophet Isaiah calls them “oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor”. Without healing, believers will remain forever crippled, less than what God has designed. This is extremely sad, for all believers can become “oaks of righteousness”.

Isaiah goes on to say that those who have been healed in these significant ways, and who have grown up, becoming “oaks of righteousness”, will be the ones who will “rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations”. In other words, these people will have the knowledge, wholeness, and ability to effect healing throughout their culture. They will be able to reverse generations of moral decay and devastation. They will be able to reverse the effects of the “sins of the fathers which have been passed along to the third or fourth generation” (Exodus 20:5). They will be able to rebuild the

culture in a healthy and godly manner, bringing Christ's healing ministry everywhere they go. They foster revival and renewal for generations to come (Exodus 20:6).

This healing process is not an option for Christians. It is the plan Jesus left for us to follow. It is our only hope to restore the Church to her healthy role and reverse the degeneration of our culture, or any culture. Jesus is willing to bring about healing for those who enter into the process He has laid out for us. The choice is ours. What will we do?