

have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me” (49.15-16). “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (66.13). “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness” (Jer. 31.3).

In Isaiah 53 we read, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6).

The Servant has carried the penalty on our behalf. The Lord is consistent (righteous) in saving us. “I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them” (61.8).

The Lord’s righteousness will lead to praise – “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness...” (v. 10).

Reflect:

- “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (1.18). In study one we noted, “God is right in his diagnosis of human sin... It is therefore reasonable and appropriate to receive and accept his promise of forgiveness and cleansing. It is foolishness to refuse his gracious offer”. The anointed one has anointed us to carry his good news into this world. What can we do to help others accept this gracious invitation of the Lord?



Studies from the book of Isaiah
by Peter J Blackburn
9. *The Spirit of the Lord*
Reading: Isaiah 61

Science fiction has a number of regular features that may express some of our secret longings. Our lives are governed by space and time. So we have the “teleport” to help the characters travel vast distances in space in no time at all – they simply dissolve here and re-appear at their destination. Forget about inter-galactic space travel – wouldn’t that be a neat way to get to Brisbane? Then there’s time travel – never without its surprises! Perhaps there have been times when you wished for a quick trip back in history – temporary, of course! – to check the facts of some family or global happening?

Mostly, the time-traveller goes **back** in time – a concession to the awareness that the future is yet to be decided. But imagine for a moment someone from the past suddenly appearing today. How confusing for them! Not a horse in sight, only this constant stream of vehicles that are nothing like the motor car of yesteryear! Everything pre-packaged in the food store and nobody to “serve” him! And what of these gadgets in the appliance shop? and those boxes with moving colour images – and sound!

Then there are old words that are pressed home with new intensity. In science fiction most people seem to have a “mission”. That’s what the story line is all about – sometimes discovering what the mission is, setting out, often against impossible odds, to fulfil it.

Reflect:

- Let’s imagine for just a moment. If it was really possible to be a “fly on the wall” at some previous time, what past event would we most like to witness? Why?
- It’s not just science-fiction characters who have some sort of “mission” these days. Just when we thought it was the good appropriate (and Christian) thing for congregations and parishes to have a “missional” statement, we discover the local school and some of the business houses have one too! Why all this interest in having a “mission”?

Anointed for a Mission

In study three, we noted that the promised “shoot of Jesse” will have the Spirit of the Lord on him – “the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Is. 11.2).

In study six, we were thinking about the major theme of the “Servant of the Lord”. We noted that the Servant would be **the** anointed one (Messiah) – “consecrated by God himself and anointed with the Spirit of God” – “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations” (42.1).

Read: Isaiah 61.1-7.

“Anointing” was always used for setting someone apart for a special purpose. They anointed priests and kings. The Hebrew word Messiah is “anointed one” and came to mean the special one the Lord was promising to send.

In 45.1-7, we have a description of Cyrus as the Lord’s “anointed” (*messiah*). There are five features here which help us understand what the Messiah was expected to be and to do –

- He is described as a person **chosen by God**. He is specifically the Lord’s anointed.
- He is appointed to fulfil a **redemptive purpose** towards the Lord’s people – “He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free” (v. 13).
- His coming will spell **judgment** for the Lord’s foes (v. 16).
- He will have **dominion** over the nations (vv. 1-3).
- In all his activities, **the real agent is the Lord himself** – “I, the Lord, do all these things” (v. 7).

But when we come to Isaiah 61, it is written in the first-person singular. Who is speaking? Is the prophet speaking about his own mission here? Partly, perhaps – or even the faithful remnant... Yet the mission goes well beyond the prophet or Cyrus. This is about **the** Messiah.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach 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 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” (vv. 1-3).

The Messiah is anointed for a mission, described here in beautiful and comforting words.

Reflect:

- Luke records that, when Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth, he was handed the Isaiah scroll and read out these words. Then he said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4.16-21). We acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (“Christ” in Greek). Luke only records the first two verses. How far would Jesus have read? Think of the life of Jesus. Name specific incidents where he fulfilled what is written here.
- Jesus is the Messiah. We are Christ-ians (Messiah-people). What is the role he alone could fulfil? What is he calling us, his people, to fulfil – anointed for mission by the same Spirit?

Righteousness and Praise

Read: Isaiah 61.8-11.

“For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations” (v. 11).

“Righteousness” is the character of God. We always measure “righteousness” by some superior standard. God is the final standard. He is always consistent with himself – so unlike the gods of the nations. “Salvation” goes hand-in-hand with “righteousness”. It is a perfectly just judgment for sinners to be sent to hell. The universe would be a moral chaos if sin was unpunished – God wouldn’t be true to his own character if it wasn’t so.

Yet again and again, the Old Testament speaks of the love of God. “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I