

The Year of the Lord's Favor

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“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. ⁵ Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; ⁶ but you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory. ⁷ Because their shame was double, and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs. ⁸ For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. ¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.” (Isaiah 61:1-11).

1. 2020 in One Word

If you describe the year 2020 in one word, what would you say? Last Monday, Twitter asked people to describe 2020 in one word. Their responses were “unstable, unsubscribe, skip, delete, reboot, and ouch!” These responses confirm that 2020 was a year of disappointment and one of the most challenging years for many people around the world. People want to live a happy life. They want to live with hope. People want to hear good news. We hear that Covid-19 vaccine is approved and ready to ship.

We are glad that vaccine is available. But some people are concerned about the side effects. Many people are looking for better news.

2. The Anointed One

Isaiah 61:1-2 says, “***The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.***”

Verse 1 says, “***The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.***” Who is “me”? He is the anointed one. In Israel, the prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. We learn that God would anoint God’s servant, the messianic figure, as well. The anointed one in Greek is *christos* which means Christ. Christ is not Jesus last name. Christ is Jesus’ title, or his mission.

Isaiah 61 is written for the Israelites in Babylon. During this time, the people waited for a savior like Moses to save God’s people. The messianic figure would proclaim good news of God’s salvation. Verse 2 says that the anointed one would proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor as well.

The year of God’s favor is called “the Year of Jubilee.” In the Year of Jubilee, four things happened: debts were cancelled, slaves were freed, the land was not farmed for a year, and property was returned to the original owners. When the people were returning from exile in Babylon, they were excited, happy, and full of hope. However, many things did not happen as they had expected.

Even they faced many challenges and opposition when they attempted to rebuild the walls and the Temple in Jerusalem. Many of the Israelites were frustrated and realized that the age of the Messiah wouldn’t be in the present but would come sometime in the future.

Luke 4:18-19 tells us that Jesus appears in the synagogue of Nazareth on a sabbath day and reads Isaiah chapter 61, “***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.***” Then he declares, “***Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing***” (Luke 4:21).

Jesus boldly announces that he has come as a messianic figure and proclaims that God’s promise in Isaiah is fulfilled through him.

3. The Year of the Lord’s Favor

Isaiah 61:2 and Luke 4:19 say that the Messiah would proclaim, “**the year of the Lord’s favor.**” At the beginning of the Year of Jubilee, on the first sabbath, trumpets would be blown, and the people would remember “the Day of Atonement” (Numbers 36:4). Yom Kippur is the day of atonement. On this day, a high priest enters the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem to burn incenses and sprinkle sacrificial animal blood to expiate his own sins and those of the people of Israel.

The Day of Atonement would be part of the Year of Jubilee celebration to remember God’s forgiveness. The Year of Jubilee is a time of deliverance and restoration and reminds us that God cares for each person and that each person should care for one another.

Jesus came to proclaim the good news of God’s favor. Jesus was our Jubilee and His words and public ministry show God’s favor to His people.

4. The Birth of Jesus

In the Old Testament, the Year of Jubilee occurred every 50 years. Today, we don’t need to wait 50 years to celebrate God’s favor. Every year, we celebrate and are reminded of God’s favor with the birth of Christ.

What does Christmas mean to us? How does the birth of Jesus impact our lives? Before we answer these questions, let us talk about the themes of this season.

5. Love and the Power of Physical Presence

The past two Sundays, we have learned about the four themes of the season of Advent. Do you remember the themes? The four themes of Advent are hope, peace, love and joy. Today’s theme is love.

How do we experience God’s love? Isaiah 43:2-3 says, “**Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.**” In this verse God promises that God would redeem us and be with us to protect us. The birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise in this scripture: “**I will be with you.**” Christmas is a day to remember that God’s love is shown to us by his presence through the birth of Jesus.

Have you ever experienced the power of physical presence? We know how important it is to keep social distancing. However, we need to remember our physical presence makes a big difference in our lives. Last May and June our daughter Ahreum stayed with us for about a month. Do you think I was happy at the time? Of course. When we visited our

grandson, do you think we were much much happier? Definitely yes. If my grandson would visit us in three weeks, do you think I will praise the Lord every moment? No question about it.

I want to thank everyone who joins for our Sunday service through zoom and in-person. Especially I am so grateful to those who are physically present here in the sanctuary. Why? It is because after an indoor service, I feel that I am empowered by the Holy Spirit and through you. I hope you feel the same that you are empowered by the Holy Spirit and through our service.

Matthew chapter one tells us that Jesus would be called Immanuel which means "God with us." God knew how important his physical presence is. That's why he sent Jesus to be with us.

6. Conclusion

Why do you think God created the Year of Jubilee? Because the Year of Jubilee is a time for people to experience God's special favor. It is also a time to share God's grace with the poor, the enslaved, the prisoners, and anybody in need. It is a time for God's people to extend our hospitality to those who need help. God teaches us how to love our neighbors through the Year of Jubilee.

7. Application

Why is Christmas celebration important? Because it is a time when anyone can experience God's love and his favor. At Christmas, we extend our hospitality to our community. At our church, we have Angel Tree. I heard that we raised \$1,800 for this outreach ministry. We thank Mary and Chip Raymond for coordinating this mission project. I am grateful to Geri Rider for coordinating to bring Christmas Bags for the residents of Cape Cod Winds in Sandwich. I want to express my thanks to our whole congregation for participating in sharing God's love and favor with others.

How would you describe the year 2020? It could be one of the most difficult years. However, we can say 2020 is the year of the Lord's favor because the Lord is with us through Jesus Christ.

During this Advent and Christmas season, I pray that we share good news of the Year of Jubilee with everyone around us. It is a time when we experience God's grace and favor. I pray that we continue to show the same love and grace that we have in Jesus with those around us. Amen.