

SESSION 1: ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:14-21, 22-30

QUESTIONS

1. What about Isaiah's prophecy and the verses in Luke are relevant to our lives?
2. The Jubilee year in Jewish tradition is a year when debts are cancelled and slaves are freed. How does this symbolize Jesus' ministry? What would you like to be "freed" from?
3. The video asks the question, "What wilderness in our hearts must we engage to emerge filled with the Spirit?" How can we be filled with the power of the Spirit after engaging in a wilderness of temptation?
4. Can you be a Christian if you don't seek the guidance, gifts, and strength that the Holy Spirit brings? Why or why not?
5. If part of Jesus' calling was to be in the middle of suffering, pain, and rejection and he was still not discouraged, what are reasons that we become discouraged in similar circumstances? How can Jesus bring hope to us?
6. What do you think the people thought when Jesus ended His reading with "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"?
7. Take a moment to read Luke 4:22-30. What do you think of the people's recorded reactions? Could they mirror your own?
8. How does Jesus's focus on the poor in the Bible affect you? How can you focus more attention on the poor?

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9. From the script: *"Jesus is guided by God's will to save mankind."* What kind of actions would demonstrate that a person today is guided by God's will to save?
10. How are we made more aware of God's faithfulness by studying the Old Testament?
11. How can you "preach good tidings to the poor"? How can you "heal the brokenhearted"? How can you "set at liberty those who are oppressed"? How can you "comfort all who mourn"?

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

The book of Isaiah

Isaiah is the second-most-quoted book in the New Testament, preceded only by Psalms. Every book in the New Testament contains allusions or direct quotations from Isaiah. The Gospel of Luke for example, portrays the entire life of Jesus through the theological lens of Isaiah:

- Jesus is "God with us," like Emmanuel in Isaiah's prophecy, and born of a "virgin" (Luke 1:27-28, 31; Isa. 7:14)
- Jesus is born into the "house of David," like "the servant, the branch" comes from Jesse – David's father – lineage (Luke 1:27; Isa. 11:1-2)
- The angels' song echoes the song in Isaiah's vision (Isa. 6; Luke 2:14)
- Zechariah is looking for God's salvation and finds it in Jesus (Luke 2:29; Isa. 12:2-3)
- John the Baptist prepares the way like the voice of the one crying in the wilderness (Luke 2:4-6; Isa. 40:3-5)
- Jesus uses Isaiah's words to defend His view against the temptations of Satan (Luke 4:12; Isa. 7:12)
- Jesus cites Isaiah, and then says that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled (Luke 4:16-21; Isa. 61:1-2)
- People marvel at Jesus' words just as people marveled at the Suffering Servant's words. They noted that Jesus seems ordinary, which also fits the description of the Servant (Luke 4:22; Isa. 52:14-15; 53:3). They despised Jesus, like the Servant, shortly after (Luke 4:23-30; Isa. 53:3).

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

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Let's read Isaiah 61:1-2 together:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...

While some of the most commonly quoted verses of Isaiah look to the future, the message of the book must first be understood in its own historical context. Isaiah addresses the sin and salvation of both God's people and the nations – showing the desperate need for a Savior. The book emphasizes both God's plan for judgment against the sinful Judah and the nations, but also expounds on God's plan for redemption. Isaiah anticipates the coming Messiah, His redeeming work, and the worship of God by all. The Messiah figure brings hope for redemption – He is the one who will redeem the people of God by suffering for them, bearing their sin, and lifting their iniquities. In doing so, the Messiah will remove the judgment upon the world for all who believe in God's work through Him.

Have you ever waited a long time for something? As you see it draw near, anticipation rises. For a long time, God had promised salvation for His people. Let's fast forward from the prophecy of Isaiah to the 4th chapter of Luke where he portrays Jesus's ministry, beginning in the temple. Have you ever wondered why Jesus would be asked to read in the temple? Isn't it amazing that He would be able to read His own prophecy in public, using the traditions and heritage of the Jewish people to proclaim His mission? In order to see how this came about, it might help to understand the order of an ancient synagogue service.

To have a synagogue service required the presence of ten adult males. At the service, the Shema was recited from Deuteronomy, followed by prayers. After this, the Scripture was read, beginning with another portion from the Torah, which is comprised of the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, and moving next to a section from the Prophets. Instruction then followed. Often the speaker linked the texts together through appeal to other passages. The service then closed with a benediction. Jesus appears to speak during the reading of the Prophets. He reads from Isaiah 61:1-2, a passage that promises the coming of God's salvation.

Read the account of Jesus in the temple, found in Luke 4:14-21.

In Luke, Jesus's reading of the prophecy agrees with how Isaiah wrote it, with three notable modifications. Luke does not include the reference to *"the day of vengeance of our God,"* thus omitting the tone of judgement found earlier in the Gospel. Also omitted from Isaiah are the words, *"to heal the brokenhearted."* Further, Luke adds the phrase from Isaiah 58, *"to let the oppressed go free,"* which taken together with *"release for the captives,"* announces the ministry of Jesus as a ministry of freedom from bondage.

Echoing the songs and sighs for justice and redemption heard throughout Luke's nativity narratives, Luke presents the primary themes of Jesus's ministry. His ministry will encompass *"good news to the poor"* whom Mary, in the Magnificat, imagined would be lifted up. In days to come, Jesus will announce God's blessing on the poor and factor the poor into His teaching, more so in Luke than in any other Gospel. Jesus' ministry will further proclaim release for the captives from the various forms of demonic, economic, social, and political bondage that oppress them. Jesus will also restore sight to the blind, not only at a physical level, but also figuratively, reviving the prophetic vision of the year of the Lord's favor. The year of the Lord's favor refers to the jubilee, when debts are cancelled and slaves are freed, and represents what Jesus brings for those who respond to His message of hope. Jesus builds on the picture of Isaiah's prophecy, which also proclaimed such hope, and notes that He is fulfilling what the prophet proclaimed.

Jesus's claim that *"today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* places both listeners and readers in the position of having to make a choice. Either you believe He brings and fulfills God's promises or you don't. This proclamation in the synagogue will become for Jesus the thread that follows Him through the entirety of His ministry. When messengers from John the Baptist ask the critical gospel question, *"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"* Jesus will prove His answers by reiterating the substance of what He declared in the synagogue: *Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them* (Luke 7:19-22).

What about the verses in Isaiah and Luke are relevant to our lives? Jesus accepts His calling and fulfills it. He does this in two ways; through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and through the guidance of His Father's will.

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