

## St Andrew's - 26 January 2025

Let's look at the various versions of the extract Luke quotes Jesus as saying from Isaiah 61:1-2a.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century AD NIV version Luke 4:18-19 quotes Isaiah <sup>18</sup> **'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century AD NIV version Isaiah 61:1-2a says: **"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"** (the little [a] says "blind" Septuagint).

The 17<sup>th</sup> century AD King James version Isaiah 61:1-2a: **"The Spirit of the Lord God *is* upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."** (Italics are missing words in original sources)

Translation of Jerome's Latin Bible 4<sup>th</sup> century AD from available sources. **"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach to the meek. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted and to preach forgiveness to the captives and an opening to the prisoners. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"**

Next translation of Hebrew Masoretic text 7-10<sup>th</sup> century AD: **"The spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted and to proclaim to the captives liberty and to the bound the opening of the prison. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"**

Next translation of the Greek Septuagint 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC: **"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to announce good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim to the captives a release and to the blind recovery of sight. To call the acceptable year of the Lord"**

We have to remember that the Old Testament version we have is based on what was decided several hundred years after the death of Jesus and not every scroll in the synagogue would be a one hundred percent copy of what both Jewish rabbis and Christian scholars reckoned it should be after comparing all the available texts both in Hebrew and the Greek Septuagint translation. That text now used and used by translators after the tenth century – mostly Protestant translators from the sixteenth century onwards, is the Masoretic text – the text of tradition which is considered the Hebrew Jewish canon. Luke records verbatim what was read out by Jesus from the scroll in front of him. In his day, what was the 100% agreed version of the Scriptures was not something people outside the circles of educated scribes and teachers of the law thought much about, and it wasn't until as late as the tenth century AD that this Hebrew version was adopted by rabbis as the most accurate version. Jerome who translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century from existing Hebrew and Greek versions. Only one version – the Septuagint – has the words "recovery of sight to the blind" which Jesus quotes, and Jesus misses out "healing the broken hearted" which every version of Isaiah includes. The Septuagint doesn't include "to set the oppressed (or crushed) free" that Jesus reads out, and Jesus doesn't mention the word "prison" or "prisoners" for the "oppressed".

The NIV does not literally translate the words in either Hebrew, Greek or Latin. Adding "Sovereign" to Lord is just embellishment because the Hebrew says "Adonai Yahweh" or "Lord God", and the words "release from darkness for the prisoners" is an opinion to fit in with the word blind if it is to alternate with prisoners, instead of "opening of prisons to the bound". This indicates that this version has issues which is why scholars always go back to the Hebrew and Greek in the Bible if they really want to know what it says. Sadly, for those who find the King James English old fashioned, it remains in many respects a more faithful translation than modern ones where translators have inserted their opinions as to what the words mean instead of just translating them. They are trying to be helpful, but in the process when someone goes back to the original languages, one can be disappointed that there is deviation from the text that actually confuses rather than enlightens.

## St Andrew's - 26 January 2025 – Luke 4:16-21 – Peter Hollander

<sup>16</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup> ***'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*** <sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

This is a well-known passage, but to start with let's look at the preceding two verses. <sup>14</sup> *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.* <sup>15</sup> *He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.*

After being in the wilderness being tempted, Jesus began his ministry. He was praised by everyone as he taught in the synagogues in Galilee. So far, so good. As a relative of John the Baptist and many witnessing his own baptism and the voice from heaven proclaiming 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' (Mark 1:11), the ministry of Jesus began well. Doubtless the miraculous transformation of water turned into wine at the wedding at Cana was talked about in the area. Luke adds a bit of background by saying that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath as was his custom and would have been attending since he was a boy, so everyone knew him. He's not with strangers but with fellow worshippers in Nazareth where he grew up.

It doesn't say if Jesus chose the scroll from which to read: it just says he was handed the scroll of Isaiah which is a particularly large roll of parchment. To find chapter 61 means most of the scroll would have to be unrolled, but more likely Isaiah was in two or more scrolls. His local synagogue has invited Jesus to read out a passage of his choosing from the scroll of Isaiah handed to him. He reads it out, but is it the same as our version of Isaiah 61? As we saw in the introduction Jesus doesn't quote our versions of Isaiah 61, but mostly the Septuagint. Luke almost word for word uses the same Greek words from the Septuagint because he is writing in Greek. He misses out "*He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted*" and misses out anything where for the second time Isaiah mentions prison or prisoners but instead mentions the oppressed. Only the Septuagint mentions *recovery of sight for the blind* but this is crucial to the ministry of Jesus.

Most Jews would understand that Isaiah was saying that the Spirit of the Lord God was either upon Isaiah as he made this prophecy, or some future Messiah (which means anointed one). The Sadducees didn't think the Bible's history books, the psalms, the wisdom and prophetic books were worth bothering about too much as they felt the first five books of Moses, the Torah, were more than enough to follow God and obey him. However, the Pharisees were the ones who constantly sought to seek fault with Jesus throughout his ministry and it would appear that there were very few Sadducees around in the countryside where Jesus spent most of his time. Most of the synagogues were run by Pharisees. Consequently, a lot of weight would be given to the words of the prophets as so much of what they said implied that the Jews would be blessed by God and live in freedom in Israel – not under the yoke of Rome or even the Herodian kings who weren't even proper Jews. So the passage itself was not controversial as who wouldn't want the poor to hear good news, though what that might be is unspecified, have those unjustly imprisoned freed and for the blind to see? The more learned in the synagogue would know how the rest of the chapter went – all of it showing how God would be making Israel great again. Throughout the Gospels we see that the people, knowing the words of the prophets, had expectations that change would happen and that the Messiah would be a secular leader like David or Solomon, restoring Israel to her former greatness and position in the world as a power to be reckoned with because God was on their side. That rose tinted view

pervades the thinking of the disciples as well as other followers of Jesus, who believed they were righteous men because they obeyed the Law of Moses and that they were emphatically not the idol worshipping sinners who caused God to complain about Israel so much – as revealed by the prophets.

Jesus sits down – that is the usual position of those in authority – and says, *'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'*

How would we react if someone read a passage from the Bible and says, *'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'*? The listeners to Jesus had a choice to believe or not believe that the year of the Lord's favour was now, and not in some future date. There would some in Nazareth who believed what Jesus said. Remember Jesus had been going around teaching in the synagogues, and all praised him (verse 15).

What Jesus meant was that he was the one anointed and Isaiah was speaking of Jesus and not Isaiah himself nor anyone else. Some had expectations that Jesus was going to change society in the coming year, but next week we'll look at the rest of the passage, as Jesus tells them what they don't want to hear.

So what can we take home from this passage.

We need to proclaim good news to the poor – both poor and needy physically, and the poor in spirit. But our good news is about forgiveness after repentance, salvation and an inheritance in God's kingdom that will never perish. The good news of Jesus Christ is not that poverty will be abolished because Jesus says (Mark 14:7) *The poor you will always have with you and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.* He says this to those who criticised the waste of an expensive pot of perfume. Deuteronomy 15:11 says *There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed towards your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.* We can extend this to fellow Christians as does Paul as recorded in Galatians 2:9-10 *James, Peter and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.* <sup>10</sup> *All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.*

The next bit in our bibles in Isaiah 61 is about healing the broken hearted – but Jesus doesn't mention them, so neither will I.

Moving on he speaks of freeing those in prison or taken captive. Should we take this literally? Should prisoners be released regardless of circumstances? Remember that the law of Moses never mentions prison as a punishment because the society had no king, no means to levy taxes to pay for prisons, and possibly God doesn't think prison is a useful punishment for any society. God's solution for most offenders in the law of Moses is the death penalty to rid society of people who chose to disobey the law and would otherwise be a bad influence. The woes of Israel resulted from the failure to enforce the law when people worshipped other gods openly in contravention of Deuteronomy 17: 2-7 <sup>2</sup> *If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant,* <sup>3</sup> *and contrary to my command has worshipped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars in the sky,* <sup>4</sup> *and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel,* <sup>5</sup> *take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.* <sup>6</sup> *On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.* <sup>7</sup> *The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.* The death penalty was mandatory for idol worship, blasphemy (taking the Lord's name in vain), Sabbath breaking (stoking a fire on the sabbath), for sons who dishonoured their parents (by attacking or cursing them), premeditated murder, adultery, kidnapping, and perjury in a capital case. Theft involved restitution or a period of slavery to repay the damages. Always there had to be two witnesses for any case to succeed.

Accusers would be those two or more witnesses. They always had to cast the first stone, before the rest of the people could throw their stones to kill the guilty person. God's justice may seem harsh, but any witness who wanted to be merciful or forgiving would probably just not make an accusation knowing that he had to cast the first stone. God's justice was to purge the evil from among you in a final way... while prison does that for a period of time.

However, that aside, freeing people from the prisons inside their heads is what Jesus is talking about. As we heard last week, we are all tempted to sin, we are all tempted to make unwise choices and usually these choices are made because they match our desires to do and say things which are bad and if not merely bad, unwise or foolish because of consequences we ought to be aware of. So often circumstances are used as an excuse for wrongdoing, but a righteous person would rather suffer than sin. The Holy Spirit changes lives by changing our thought processes so that we realise God's ways are better than any other ways that the world offers mankind. Loving God instead of following our own selfish desires enables us to see that the way, the truth and the life is based on love and unselfishness. Jesus wants to set people free from the prisons of their minds and release their minds captured by the prince of this world who wants to lead people away from Jesus. It's not just people in prison physically – who are in need of good news, but people locked into making bad choices and suffering as a result of those choices, even if they were seeking pleasures that they really ought to have known will turn sour.

Next, we have the blind... those who do not want to see Jesus, those who look the other way when confronted with truth and facts about God that they simply reject because it will make them accountable for their actions. Are there bits in our bibles that we find difficult? Do we skate over passages that we would rather not look at because they make us uncomfortable? Are we blind when we see something needs doing and hope that somebody else – whoever he or she may be – will do what needs to be done. It is somewhat cynical to believe that because someone else is gifted with some talent or other, that we are doing them a favour by expecting them to exercise that talent when in our heart of hearts, we know it is a chore we want to avoid. "Someone else" – he's everywhere you know – once said if you see something that needs doing and you could do it, that's God opening your eyes so that you can see that you can do this rather than leaving it for "someone else" to do. We all know Jesus literally healed the blind and today that remains a possibility, but opening our understanding of the Word of God says is very necessary for all of us.

The oppressed are bound by evil desires and seem unable to break free from what they are doing. How do we face these challenges? Talking to people who are in need can so often result in a personal challenge. What are you going to do to solve their problems if they cannot see how they can solve them on their own? Jesus talked to crowds of people, and on occasion he provided lunch for thousands and wine for hundreds, but he had no money. Jesus talked to the sick, the blind and healed them... but he had no medicine or operating theatre. Jesus released those whose minds were taken captive by the evil one, but he wasn't a trained psychiatrist. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and did things that were contrary to our limited known laws of nature because God is a supernatural being and can do anything. Nothing is impossible with God. Do we expect to be able to do what is supernatural? A soul, a human mind, hearing the Holy Spirit speaking and telling what he says to the people who need to hear those words will do what Jesus did and still does today.

What is the reality of our obedience to what Jesus says in his ministry? A fortnight ago, Steve Smith talked about the attitude of some Christians in their fellowships who believed "someone else" would do the things that they knew needed to be done but thought that "someone else" was always available to do them.

In the secular world, the expectation that "someone else" will do what is needed is even stronger than it is in the church because the State has decided to pay people out of the taxes collected to be the "someone else" to do the jobs that in the past were done by family, friends and neighbours on a voluntary unpaid

basis. Jesus never expected anyone to pay taxes so they could avoid doing what was needed. He lambasts the Pharisees for putting a little money in the Temple offering box (corben) to avoid paying substantially more to look after their aged parents left in poverty and destitution. Paying taxes doesn't mean we can palm off responsibilities to the State when help is needed which we could provide ourselves.

Back to Jesus and his ministry. Did he give money or accommodation to the poor? No, he said the poor will always be with us. Did he attempt to get any prisoners released? Did he get John the Baptist released from prison? No, he never went against the civil authorities. Did he enable the blind guides of the people – the scribes, teachers of the law, the Pharisees to see? Whatever he did say to them just annoyed them so much that they hated him and plotted to have him killed. It seems they remained blind and as a result the Jewish authorities in Israel were crushed and destroyed along with the Temple by the Romans in AD70 after numerous rebellions and much infighting among factions within Israel. However, the physically blind recovered their sight, and in the case of the man blind from birth, received sight for the first time in his life. Jesus wasn't a political activist fighting injustice and agitating for "someone else" to do what he knows every disciple can and should do. I will repeat that... Jesus was not a political activist seeking to topple governments, change the law or petition for more funding for good causes. His message is for all men to repent, believe in God, and become his disciples. He sought disciples to follow him.

What is a disciple? **A disciple loves God and worships Him; a disciple reads God's word and obeys it; a disciple loves the church and serves in it.** The ministry of Jesus is to change hearts and minds so that they turn to God and with the Holy Spirit's guidance enable people to build the kingdom of God on earth. That is a kingdom of men and women who have an eternal future and who love God and their neighbours. They don't expect "someone else" to do or say what they could do or say themselves, whether on their own or with others.

Jesus began his ministry revealing what he would do.. he presented his mission to the people in Nazareth. Luke's account of what he did on earth and later through the Acts of the Apostles show that he actually did what he said he would do, and he said his disciples would do likewise. The apostles saw what Jesus did and did likewise. The mission of the church is to proclaim Good News of Jesus Christ, who is the saviour of all mankind. As Jesus said to Paul in Acts 26:17-18: *I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.* Let's make it our mission in the coming weeks and months.

As Joyce Edeki mentioned three weeks ago, to be effective we should read our Bible daily, but at least four times a week. Less than that seems to result in being ineffective. We need to worship and pray daily, and it is good advice to put the full armour on daily (Ephesians 6). When we pray, ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us today. If we hear something from God, or see something, or are prompted by something from Holy Spirit, obey and do what is required. All of us, however weak and feeble we may feel, are useful in the kingdom of God. The power of prayer is supernatural power. Prayer moves mountains and changes lives. Let's pray.

### ***Judith's benediction (the Judith who severed the head of Holofernes)***

*And now bless the God of all, who in every way does great things; who exalts our days from birth, and deals with us according to his mercy. <sup>23</sup> May he give us gladness of heart, and grant that peace may be in our days in Israel, as in the days of old. <sup>24</sup> May he entrust to us his mercy! And let him deliver us in our days!*